BICYCLING AUSTRALIA

PEAK ROAD PERFORMANCE

ISSUE 252
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SPECIAL

Ride gravel

Off-road adventure

Cycling Japan

Riding the popular Shimanami Kaido

Tested

Zwift Ride, Orbea Terra, Bossi, Wahoo ELEMNT Ace, HoverAir drone + more

Guide to the Spring Classics

Road Bikes

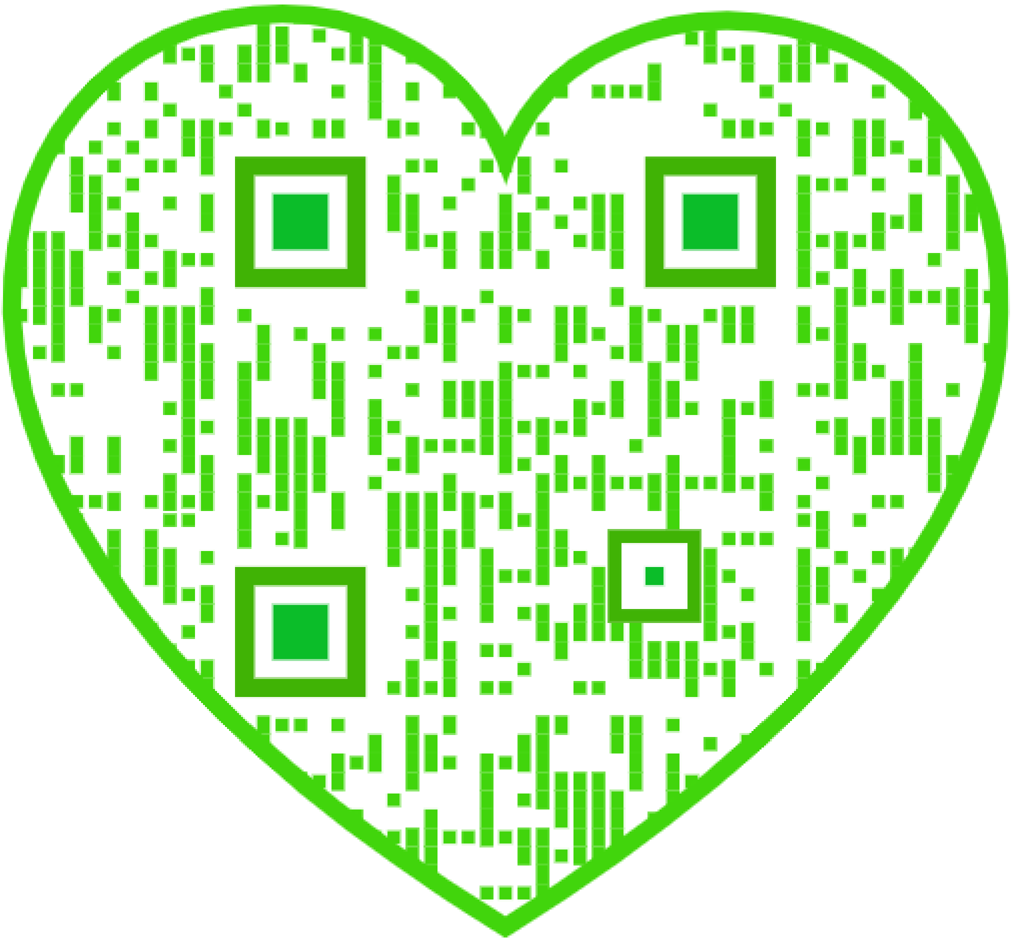
Which type of road bike will suit your needs best?

Kaden Groves

Exclusive interview with the Aussie sprinter

Japanese Keirin

We uncover some of the secrets of this quirky Japanese sport



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One Beautiful Day

"You're off to great places. Today is your day.
Your mountain is waiting. So get on your way." —Dr. Seuss

A lot can happen in a day. Just ask a pro cyclist when the Spring Classics roll around. Like Ian Stannard who outsmarted the Wolfpack to win Omloop Het Nieuwsblad from a four-rider breakaway in 2015. Or the unfancied Gerald Ciolek who defied Sagan and Cancellara, not to mention a blizzard, to snatch the epic Milano-Sanremo of 2013. How about when Matty Hayman conquered Paris-Roubaix in 2016 after a trainer-based preparation due to a broken arm? And who will ever forget Amstel Gold, 2019, when Mathieu Van Der Poel single-handedly closed a one-minute gap in the closing kilometres to claim a breathless victory that still beggars belief?

It's dramatic. It's unpredictable. It's compelling. It engages and captivates us, season after season. Whereas the strongest teams and riders typically prevail, eventually, in the Grand Tours, narratives are rarely straightforward in the Classics. On any given day, any number of things can happen, and any number of riders will consider they have a genuine shot at victory, legs and good fortune willing. Punctures and mechanicals, for example, take on far greater significance. Time lost on the roadside may never be recovered. Make a tactical error at the wrong time? Try again next year. Then there's the weather of course, often as influential as any opponent.

Day after day after day, the European Spring is filled with an addictive uncertainty rarely witnessed during the rest of the season. Pelotons explode. Dreams evaporate. Legends grow. Watching it all are well-lubricated fans from all corners of the globe (including ours) creating heaving, concert-like atmospheres along cycling's most epic bergs and tortuous cobbles. No jerseys to defend. No GC time gaps to close. No tomorrow. Just today. Make it count. BA

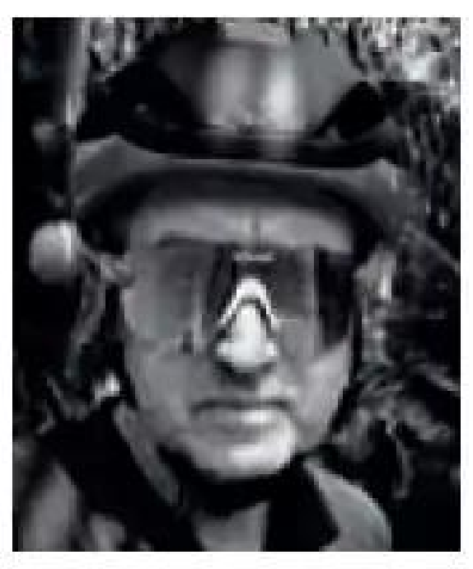
Our Contributors

Peter Maniaty
Peter is Bicycling Australia's senior journalist, and highly respected in the world of cycling. From bike reviews, to destination features and nitty gritty opinion pieces, he's a gun writer.

Anthony Tan
One of our longest-serving columnists, 'TanMan' has a deep passion for the sport and is a natural communicator.

Lee 'Hollywood' Turner
'Hollywood' is one of Australia's best known and most colourful cyclists. Lee Turner always rides hard, speaks his mind and tells it as it is.

Michael Hanslip
Michael has been racing all kinds of bikes, coaching, bike fitting, cycling commuting, and contributing to BA from Canberra for over 30 years.



Steve Thomas
Steve is a veteran cycling journalist and skilled photographer. He has contributed to numerous publications worldwide, including Bicycling Australia, for over 30 years!

Luke Meers
Wollongong-based writer Luke is a strong and competitive bike rider. He writes regular tech and gear reviews for Bicycling Australia and isn't afraid to get his hands dirty.

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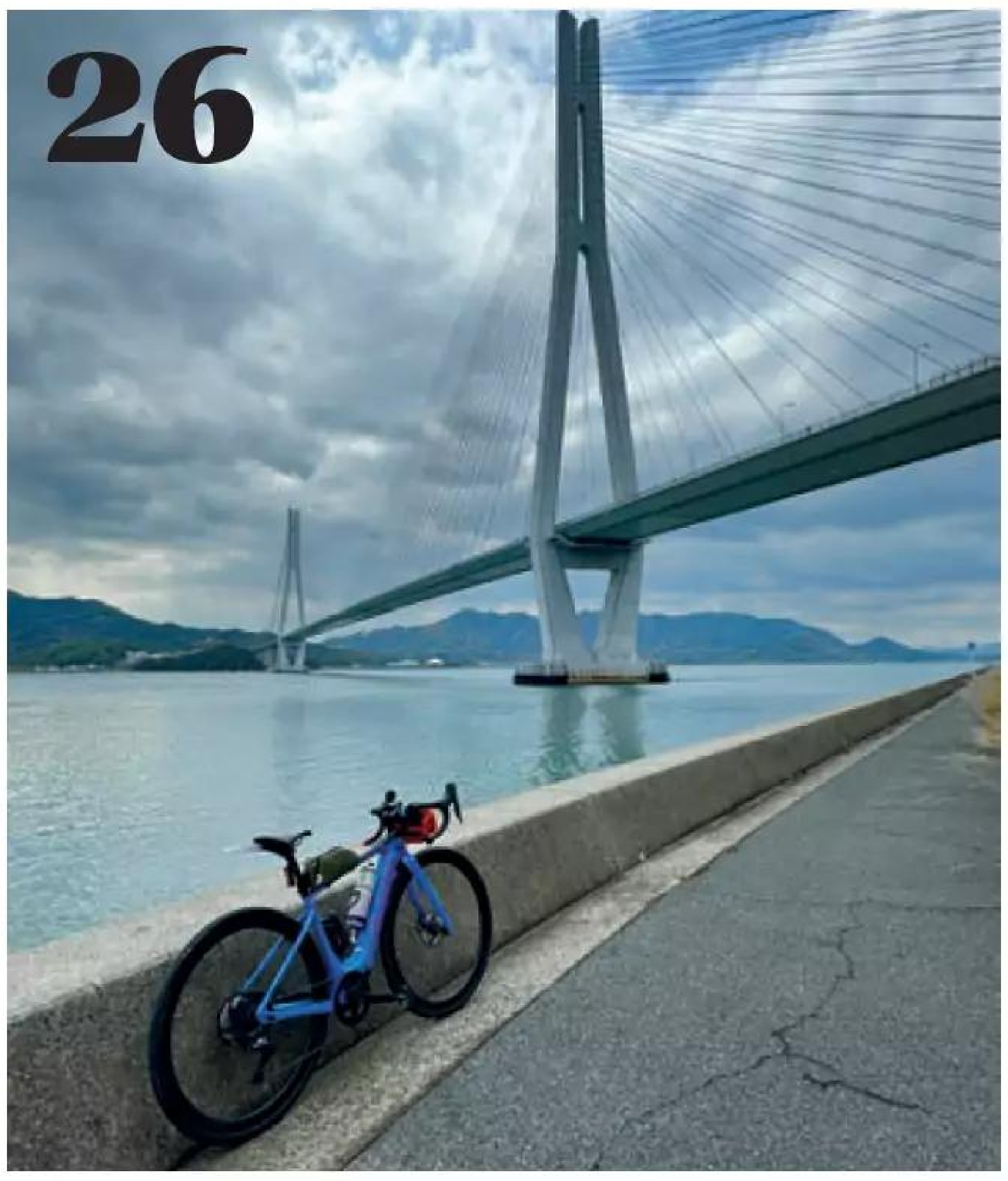
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ON THE COVER: Beardy McBeard captures an idyllic gravel ride in Tasmania. © Beardy McBeard

Why is road cycling addictive?

I'm not sure if I can really answer that question, but I do know that road cycling is addictive, and I'm sure if you asked ten riders, they'd all have a different answer.

I suspect it is because it is such a multifaceted pastime. By that, I mean it's a form of exercise, a social activity, a community, and a competition if you want it to be. And I'm sure there are many other facets I've not listed here.

When I first took it up, I focused principally on the form of exercise, but as I met other riders and learnt about the equipment and how to use it, it became so much more.

During the pandemic lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, it was my entire social life. I'm a very social person who loves to chat (anyone who's met me will attest to that), and riding with a select group of mates (always in pairs as the rules dictated) was my sanity check. It also provided much-needed exercise and outdoor time, but it kept my mental health in check.

Cycling has also given me a strong sense of community. I've lived in the same area for more than 30 years, and it was not until I took up cycling that I met loads of people who live nearby and are now part of my tribe.

Fast-forward 16 years, and I can say I'm completely and utterly addicted to road cycling.

Inside this issue

Our main destination piece in this issue is about the Shimanami Kaido area of Japan. It's an awesome place to ride your bike, and I'm lucky enough to have been there in 2018. We continue the theme with an article about Keirin racing in Japan.

With the Mudgee Classic and Dirty Mudgee coming up in May, we focus on riding gravel near Mudgee.

Plus, there are our usual bike and gear round-ups. I was lucky to test the Orbea Terra gravel bike for this issue. We also include a review of the Wahoo Elemnt ACE, HoverAir drone, BBB glasses and more.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. Drop me a line at nicolarutzou@yaffa.com.au to share why you're addicted to cycling.

Nicola Rutzou, Editor

Observations for the year ahead

Publisher **James Yaffa** makes some thought-provoking observations for the year ahead.

James Yaffa & Tracy Yaffa, of Yaffa Media.

Welcome back to another jam-packed year full of news, views, reviews, and spades of inspiration from the team at *BA*. While predictions for 2025 are next to impossible, especially with Trump in the big seat and volatile economic and political winds from around the globe, observations could be a better way to project the mood.

International Cycling Tours will be negatively affected by a depressed Australian dollar (at time of writing) putting the brakes on the cycling tour market. Clearly, it depends on your income bracket, but if 2025 is the year for your long-awaited overseas cycling trip, enjoy it. I advise you not to compare currencies while sipping on your latte!

'Disc v Rim?' will be a key question in 2025. My industry contacts tell me that 99 per cent of new bikes are now disc, but industry data is lacking. Does anyone know how many riders are still zipping around on rim brake bikes? The brands that articulate why the upgrade is so beneficial will capitalise on what I feel is a huge percentage of riders on rim brake bikes. The benefits of disc bikes are immense. Watch this space.

Insurance often makes media headlines as consumers continue to pay obscene premiums for all forms of insurance. This impact is immense for bike owners, and it's worth reviewing your policies to ensure your bike and gear are covered in your home and contents policy.

Cycling infrastructure and public safety awareness are vital topics that will continue to rise as the government spending boom shows no sign of slowing. Most of our cities are undergoing radical change, and the development of roads and transport is rising. As population growth continues to soar, delivering more cars and congestion on our roads, what exactly is the future for cycling in your state? *BA* will continue to champion this.

Yaffa Media is 100 not out, so you'll see a special feature in this issue dedicated to celebrating *BA*'s holding company, Yaffa Media's 100th Birthday! As a third-generation member of the Yaffa family, I am immensely proud of our company's role in storytelling for Australians across many sectors. I want to acknowledge and thank our hard-working, talented staff, past and present, our loyal audiences and commercial partners who have supported us on this amazing journey. BA

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The Latest Gear

At BA, we have fun every issue putting together our list of the latest bikes and gear.

New Giant TT bike

Giant has released the new Trinity Advanced SL, an all-new triathlon/ time trial bike developed and tested with Ironman world champions and WorldTour road pros.

Giant says the new speed machine is 558g lighter than its predecessor and features new integrated disc brakes for greater control. It also has added compliance in the armrests and seatpost to help absorb bumps and vibrations. The front end has been redesigned with more armrest adjustments for stack, reach, angle, and width, while a wider range of seatpost offset options allows the rider to find their ideal pedalling position.

The series includes two options: the Trinity Advanced SL designed for triathlons, while the Trinity Advanced SL TT frameset is aimed at time trial performance. Both are built on the same frameset, with the differences in the setup.

The Trinity Advanced SL TT frameset has an integrated down-tube water bottle cage. Riders from the Team Jayco AlUla WorldTour squad, including Luke Plapp, have developed, tested, and raced it (on prototype models). After racing prototypes in 2024, Plapp rode his new Trinity Advanced SL TT bike to a third straight Australian Elite Men's National Time Trial Championship on January 9.

More info www.giant-bicycles.com/au

Campag Shamal wheelset

Campagnolo has unveiled its revamped Shamal Dual Profile wheelset, which uses a waved rim profile for an aerodynamic advantage in crosswind conditions and improved handling. Campag describes the new wheels as having a double-height design (45/40mm), but essentially, the area on the rim where the spokes connect is 45mm while the rest is 40mm.

Initially released in 1992, Shamal wheels are known for innovation. They were the first to use the concept of a high-profile and aerodynamic design, which was once championed by cycling legends like Miguel Indurain and Marco Pantani.

The latest Shamal wheels feature hooked-rim technology to support larger tyres (28mm+) for smoother, more comfortable rides. The 2-Way Fit system allows riders to switch between clincher and tubeless setups. Aluminium hubs, built with a cup & cone system, ensure easy maintenance and comfort out on the road.

More info www.fesports.com.au

Trek Madone colourway

Everyone loves a bit of bling, and Trek's new Madone colourway offers that in spades. Trek describes the Chroma Synthwave colourway as a vibrant, neon-soaked masterpiece against midnight hues.

It's the newest colourway to join the Chroma Project One family.

Trek says the bike is ultra-light, matching the Madone Gen 8, helping riders climb faster and enjoy aerodynamic speed.

The new Chroma Synthwave gloss with blue and pink contours is available except for Checkmate on all premium road platforms.

More info www.trekbikes.com/au

PROJECT ONE
TREK

Northwave Veloce Extreme shoes

While not brand new, the Northwave Veloce Extreme shoes are still worth a mention. Worn by Italian pro cyclist Filippo Ganna, known for his time trial prowess throughout 2023, the Veloce Extreme is now available to the masses.

Northwave says the high-end shoes are crafted from 100 per cent unidirectional carbon with a stiffness index of 15, ensuring maximum power transfer through its high-tail structure and patented Powershape system.

The new support technology adds extra stability, while the heel's grip-enhancing fibres prevent slippage for a secure ride.

Equipped with dual dials, the Veloce Extreme shoes offer micrometric adjustment and dual-zone closure for a tailored fit. Two double-density footbeds (slim and regular) allow riders to customise, and replaceable rubber heel pads extend the shoe's lifespan.

More info www.northwave.com.au

Santini cargo bib shorts

Santini's new Cargo Bib Shorts are ideal for gravel enthusiasts and off-road adventurers. Made from a high-density lycra fabric, they offer abrasion resistance while staying soft and comfortable against the skin. The ribbed elastic straps and breathable mesh back ensure comfort and ventilation.

They have ample storage for ride essentials with two leg pockets and two additional lumbar pockets. The reflective detailing on the back legs enhances visibility during low-light rides, while the elastic honeycomb grip keeps everything securely in place.

Santini says the chamois, featuring a gel core, provides shock absorption for long-distance comfort. Women's versions include a specific women's chamois, specifically designed for an anatomical fit.

Available in Black, Burgundy, and Military Green and sizes XS to 4XL, these bib shorts pair well with many jerseys.

More info www.santinisms.com.au

Schwalbe G-One R Pro Line

SCHWALBE G-ONE R PRO

Schwalbe has released its next generation of race-optimised gravel tyres. Developed with professional cyclists, Schwalbe describes the new range as providing limitless speed, control and grip on any surface.

Schwalbe's development team has optimised the Race Pro construction in two areas compared to the previous Super Race construction: puncture protection and rolling resistance. While maintaining the same weight, they have increased the puncture protection and improved the rolling characteristics.

The increased puncture protection is due to the wider, lightweight, cut-resistant, high-tech fibre that offers a more reliable puncture-resistant belt, protecting a larger area of the tyre from sharp objects.

Available in three tread patterns (RX PRO, R PRO and RS PRO) to suit different requirements, they come with black or transparent sidewalls. The new range includes widths of up to 50mm across the entire G-One PRO range.

More info www.bikebox.com.au

Koo Hype sunglasses

Premium Italian eyewear brand KOO Eyewear has launched the new Hype cycling glasses focused on maximum ventilation.

Mainly intended for road cycling, Hype is designed with venting ports on either side of the frames and one in the centre of the glasses. This central ventilation placement provides consistent airflow to prevent fogging.

As with all things Italian, the KOO Hype glasses are designed to look good but still incorporate the essential features of sports eyewear, such as performance-oriented ergonomics, a wide field of vision, and wrap-around temples for maximum stability.

The polycarbonate toric lens utilises a double-curvature shape for visual comfort, while an eco-friendly frame made from 45 per cent bio-based polymer materials ticks the sustainability box.

The KOO Hype frames are compatible with KOO Eyewear's Optical Clip, which allows for prescription lens application as needed. The HYPE collection includes nine different colourways to suit every rider's needs.

More info kooworld.cc/apac/en/

MagicShine SEEMEE R300 radar taillight

The new MagicShine R300 is a rear light with built-in radar detection. It detects approaching vehicles up to 140 metres away and monitors speeds between five to 100 km/h. This safety system potentially reduces the risk of rear collisions, ensuring riders remain visible and aware on the road.

With a maximum output of 300 lumens and 2,400-metre visibility, the MagicShine R300 stands out in all lighting conditions. The 270° wide viewing angle enhances side visibility, making it ideal for urban cycling, road riding, and commuting.

The MagicShine R300 has ANT+, so it can integrate with compatible bike computers, delivering real-time radar feedback for situational awareness on a rider's computer screen.

With long-lasting performance, the R300 offers up to 100 hours of runtime on a single charge. The taillight is also durable, easy to set up and install, and comes with two rubber mounts.

More info www.magicshine.com.au

Shimano Cues for drop bars

Shimano has replaced its Tiagra, Sora, and Claris groupsets with the new CUES components. CUES has previously been available for flat-bar, e-bikes, and mountain bikes.

One common component set works with 9, 10, and 11-speed drivetrains by replacing the three groupsets. With the same component set across the disciplines, the range is now more straightforward. Riders can swap components to add extra speeds to their drivetrain rather than replacing their entire groupset.

This compatibility is achieved with common cassette sprocket spacing and the same pull ratios for mechanical gear cables for all speeds and disciplines, something Shimano components lacked.

More info www.bike.shimano.com

Colnago Y1Rs

Italian bike brand Colnago has unveiled the Y1Rs, a new aero race bike that the company claims is faster than anything else on the market.

The new handlebars are a key component of the new design and a major part of the Y1Rs' aerodynamic advancements, according to Colnago. The handlebar design features a distinctive Y-shaped profile inspired by aeronautical and motorsport engineering.

Colnago also has a new seatpost joint with a novel design that optimises aerodynamic performance and rider comfort. With two interlocking Y-shaped elements, the seatpost aligns with the seat tube while following the contour of the rear wheel. This design reduces drag in a critical airflow zone.

The new Colnago Y1Rs also includes an unusual curved downtube and integrated bottle cages. Colnago says the downtube is designed to optimise airflow while maintaining structural integrity, and the integrated bottle cages are designed to align with the downtube, minimising aerodynamic loss.

This meticulous approach allowed Colnago to optimise every component, from tube profiles to the positioning of the handlebars and bottle cages, ensuring seamless integration and aerodynamic efficiency.

Colnago says the new Y1Rs are faster than the competition, potentially giving UAE Emirates team leader Tadej Pogačar the fastest bike in the peloton – as if he needed it!!

More info www.colnago.com/en-au

COLNAGO
Emirates

Restrap Bar Bag

The Restrap Bar Bag is ideal for bikepacking, touring, or commuting, offering an easy setup that fits most bikes. No racks, mounts, or tools are needed. The foam spacers and spring-loaded cam locks for a snug handlebar fit, with lower retention straps adding stability by wrapping around the fork crown.

This waterproof bag has reflective detailing, a two-part dry bag, and a magnetic system that ensures the food pouch is secure and easily accessible.

More info www.bikechain.com.au

“Cyclists see considerably more of this beautiful world than any other class of citizens.”

DR K K DOTY, 19TH CENTURY NEW YORKER

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What makes the Spring Classics so special?

Steve Thomas provides an overview of these epic single-day races and the Aussies who have and who might conquer them this year.

WORDS: STEVE THOMAS

The challenging Arenberg Forest during the 2024 Paris-Roubaix.

ABOVE: Julian Alaphilippe in action in the 2024 Tour of Flanders.

OPPOSITE: Michael Matthews on the podium (second place) in the 2024 Milan-San Remo.

Many of professional cycling's oldest, toughest, and greatest single-day road races take place in the often wet and chilly north of Europe during the March-April European early spring period. Although the traditional European pro season starts a tad further south and several weeks earlier, it's these northern classics that rule the cycling roost in terms of stature, both to riders, teams and fans alike, with the long-distance Milan-San Remo being the only major traditional spring classic outside of this slice of northern Europe.

Numerous races are crammed into this two-month slot, from those termed as "season openers" to the rough and dirty "cobbled classics" and the hilly "Ardennes classics," which mark the unofficial end of the spring classic season. Major WorldTour teams have traditionally focused their season on these prestigious and brutal races. However, many have recently broadened their outlooks and racing options to include the grand tours. Yet these races remain career-defining for many.

Defining monuments & classics

The term classic is often used in cycling and elsewhere in life, although, in truth, no official criteria are required to be termed a classic; hence, many races carry the term classic or semi-classic. However, a select list of races is widely accepted as a "monument" or "classic" by just about everyone involved in the sport.

There are five "monument" classics in cycling, of which four are listed in our famous five of the spring – with the fifth being the Tour of Lombardy, which takes place in October. These are the five oldest, toughest, and most prestigious classics in cycling. Whether that list will grow in time is unknown, although logic would say that races will be added to the list in time. There are only three riders who have ever won all five monuments: Rik Van Looy (RIP), Roger De Vlaeminck and Eddy Merckx, all Belgians – a nation that not only hosts the lion's share of spring classics but whose riders dominate them.

The famous five

MILAN-SAN REMO, 22/03/25, ITALY (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

Known as "la Primavera," the Milan-San Remo was first held in 1907. It runs from the cosmopolitan city of Milan in Northern Italy southwards and then along the Mediterranean coastline to the retro-chic town of San Remo. At almost 300km long, it is the longest single-day classic on the pro calendar and is the first monument of the season.

The first 250km of the race are usually quite tame, with showdown coming in the final 50km thanks to the short but sharply raced climbs of the Cipressa and Poggio (and its twisted descent), features that usually decide the race results, and often in nail biking style. This is traditionally a race for sprinters who can get over the climb and go the distance, plus fast finishing "puncheurs".

Australian riders have regularly featured in the illustrious final showdown of what many consider the most glamorous spring classic. Matt Goss won in 2011; in 2012, Simon Gerrans doubled the Aussie victory. This year also sees the welcome return of the Milan-San Remo Donne, the women's version of the classic.

TOUR OF FLANDERS, 6/04/25, BELGIUM (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

The "Ronde van Vlaanderen" is the first of the cobbled monuments of the year and has been running since 1913. This truly relentless and cruel classic shows little respite along its cobbled way, which comes spiced with around 17-20 of the most infamous Flandrian cobbled bergs, thrown into the latter half of the race. Season the mix with countless spring breeze-lashed twists and turns on narrow and open backroads to add to the drama. Flanders is one of the physically and technically hardest to win.

From the halfway point on, this is an amazing race to watch, much like a game of chess played out in the dark by grand masters on bikes. Many of the greatest classic racers of all time have failed to win this race, and thus far, no Australian has battered the bergs to perfection and glory.

PARIS-ROUBAIX, 13/04/25, FRANCE (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

Known respectfully as "l'enfer du Nord" (Hell of the North), the Paris-Roubaix is arguably the most gruelling and iconic of all of the single-day classics. First held in 1896, this cobbled classic is one that all fans love to watch, which many riders detest and fear and which others have an endearing deep passion for.

The race now starts in Compiegne, around 100km north of central Paris, and covers a largely flat and gently winding way to finish on the old open velodrome at Roubaix. The cobbles kick in after around 100km and intensify from then on. Although the cobbled sectors vary slightly each year, around 55-60km and 29 of rough and cobbled sectors are included each year. Run in the wet or dry, this is perhaps the toughest of all classic races – on both the body and bike and one where luck also plays a huge role.

In 2007, SA's Stuart O'Grady tamed the cobbles to claim Australia's first-ever victory here, although Matt Hayman's 2016 tugged at many a heartstring, both from inside and outside of the peloton. In 2021, the first Paris-Roubaix Femmes took place and provided a huge profile boost for the women's side of the sport.

AMSTEL GOLD, 20/04/25, NETHERLANDS (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

Although the Amstel Gold race is not a monument (it started out in 1966), it is still one of the most prized and toughest of the spring classics. Although the Netherlands is mostly flat, this race takes place around the rural and hilly lanes of Limburg. With more than 30 short sharp climbs along the way, it surely tackles most of the hills in the country.

55km

The cobbled roads in the Paris-Roubaix

ABOVE: The Cote de Saint Roch in the 2024 Liege-Bastogne-Liege.

With its erratic and twisted route, this is a very tough race to win and is one for those with good old-fashioned race craft mastery. Australians are often to the fore here, and Phil Anderson's solo 1984 victory was the first major classic win by any Australian, and he is still the only Aussie to score the top spot here.

LIEGE-BASTOGNE-LIEGE 27/4/25, BELGIUM (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

First run in 1892, Liege-Bastogne-Liege is the oldest of the monuments and one of the oldest bike races. The race is held in the hilly Ardennes region of southern Belgium, and although its 250km+ route varies slightly from year to year, it is always based on a loop between the two cities. A series of around 10-12 really tough and steep climbs is strewn along the way, making this a race for all-rounders who can climb well; hence, many grand tour contenders focus their spring hopes here.

Back in 2014, Simon Gerrans took Australia's only male victory here when he outsprinted Alexandro Valverde. Last year, Grace Brown took a superb win here in Liege-Bastogne-Liege Femmes, held since 2017.

The young pretender

STRADE BIANCHI, 8/3/25, ITALY (MEN'S & WOMEN'S)

Following the huge success of the L'Eroica Strade Bianchi retro sportive in Tuscany, the race organisers RCS launched a pro race version of the event in 2007, which was first held in October. The following year, it was moved to March, from where it evolved rapidly to become known as Strade Bianchi, a fast and furious Tuscan challenge run on a mix of white gravel roads and paved country roads, and finishing high in the historic centre of Sienna.

Despite its youth, this race has become one of the most spectacular, prized and dramatic. No Australians have yet conquered it.

The Super Eight – best of the rest

- Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, 1/3/25, Belgium (Men's & Women's)
- Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne, 2/3/25, Belgium
- E3 Saxo Bank Classic, 28/3/25, Belgium
- Gent-Wevelgem, 30/3/25, Belgium (Men's & Women's races)
- Dwars door Vlaanderen, 2/3/25, Belgium (Men's & Women's)
- Scheldeprijs, 9/3/25, Belgium (Men's & Women's)
- Brabantse Pijl, 18/3/25 (Men's & Women's)
- La Fleche Wallonne, 23/3/25, Belgian Ardennes (Men's & Women's)

Australian contenders this year

Going into the 2025 spring classic season, Australia has an incredibly strong and broad bunch of racers out there challenging the Europeans on home turf. Early into the new season, and it's always hard to nail down precise race schedules and to tip the form books, though it would be fair to assess that Michael Matthews and Kaden Groves could well figure in faster finishing classics and Milan-San Remo and both have an eye on results here.

On the rougher and hillier terrain, we would expect the evergreen Simon Clarke and the ever-sharpening Luke Plapp to be close to the head of affairs, while the Ardennes climbs should suit Ben O'Connor well, and even Jay Vine and Jai Hindley – if they choose to chase the spring that is.

RIDE EXPERIENCE

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Our Signature tour with many praises from our guests and recommendation from Japanese Ministry of the Environment.The Tohoku region, the northernmost part of Japan’ s main island, is known for its gorgeous natural environment, rich local history, and delicious agricultural produce. Experience a more traditional side of Japan and follow in the footsteps of famous Japanese "Haiku" poet Matsuo Basho and his journey along “The Narrow Road to the Deep North” .

2025 Tours
(1) June 1 - June 12, 2025 Available
(2) July 1 - July 12, 2025 Available
(3) August 31 - September 11, 2025 Fully Booked
(4) September 16 - September 27, 2025 Fully Booked
(5) September 30 - October 11, 2025 Fully Booked
All 2026 Tours are still Available

Foodie’s Bike Tour NASU – NIKKO

6 days 5 nights

In this foodie's bike tour, you will go on an eating spree and experience a wide variety of great food that Japan has to offer. You will visit historic towns and stay at long-established hotels and ryokans (inns), which have been welcoming VIPs from inside and outside Japan for a long time, and also at accommodations that are committed to serving high quality meals.

2025 Tours
(1) May 26 - May 31, 2025 Available
(2) July 7 - July 12, 2025 Available
(3) October 20 - October 25, 2025 Available

KUMANO KODO Pilgrimage Bike & Hike

7 days 6 nights

In this tour, you will be biking and hiking on Japan's oldest ancient pilgrimage roads called "Kumano Kodo", in the south of Wakayama. Visit the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano, and will find yourself completely immersed in the beautiful nature of spectacular mountain ranges, massive and strange rocks, clear streams of water, and magnificent waterfalls.

2025 Tours
(1) March 23 - March 29, 2025 Fully Booked
(2) March 30 - April 5, 2025 Fully Booked
(3) November 26 - December 2, 2025 Available
All 2026 Tours are still Availableours are still Available

Testimonials

【Anne Condon】 Trans-Tohoku Bike Tour
Our guided Trans-Tohoku tour with Tetsuya and Hiro was truly epic! Each day was filled with opportunities to learn about the history, culture, and food in ways that would not have been possible by ourselves.

【Evy Pham】 Foodie’s Bike Tour Nasu – Nikko
Knowledgeable guide took us to hidden local gems, including beautiful ryokans and charming restaurants. High-quality bikes, well-designed routes, and breathtaking scenery. Excellent attention to detail and top-notch customer service. Highly recommend for an authentic and memorable experience.

Fall in love with riding in Japan

Self-confessed Japanophile Tina McCarthy shares her love of riding the Shimanami Kaido route and the great things to see along the way.

WORDS: TINA MCCARTHY

'So where in Japan are you from?'

'I come from Hiroshima.'

'Aaah … a very historical city.'

'Yes, and I was there at a very historic time.'

The silence that followed punctuated the power of the moment.

And so my love affair with Japan began. Who was this mysterious woman of few words? Jet black hair, precise and delicate moves and a kindness I had never experienced in a stranger before. She came bearing gifts which to this day I still treasure.

That was over 50 years ago when my father had a business colleague from Japan come to stay with us. As a child I was left with a yearning to visit Japan and find out more about the mystery that Motoko embodied. It took another 15 or so years before I finally had my chance to visit Japan on a university design study tour. From that day forward, I was completely and totally besotted … it was my happy place, full of intrigue, mystery, juxtapositions and downright quirkiness!

Though I visited many places in Japan in the years that followed, it wasn't until I found the love of cycling back in 2012 that my experiences in Japan changed. Suddenly, a whole new view of Japan opened. Away from the big cities and flashing neon, I had the chance to immerse in what I have since called 'the real Japan'. Everyday life of villages populated with elderly, small stores selling local produce on a 'trust' basis and the thrill of seeing pelotons of laughing children making their way to school unburdened by parental assistance.

Of the 25 million international tourists who visited Japan in 2023, approximately two-thirds only visited what is known as the 'golden tourist route': Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. But it seems that inbound cycle tourism is a growing economic opportunity for smaller prefectures and, thus, the opportunity to benefit from their share of the inbound tourism pie.

Some prefectures working hard to build their inbound cycle tourism include Tottori, Fukui, Fukuoka, Shimane, Ehime and Hiroshima Prefectures. Home to the first government-designated National Cycle Routes, the Shimanami Kaido gains a huge amount of press. And rightly so … it is a cyclist's dream course of quiet roads with overtly courteous drivers, undulating hills that lead you through bamboo forests and citrus groves, views of azure seas and bridges that are engineering marvels.

Tina McCarthy and friend riding through the Sagishima bamboo forest.

ABOVE: The Takamiyama climb at Mukaishima.

RIGHT: Les Dix Sept Bateaux at Mukaishima.

I'm not sure how many times I have ridden the spectacular Shimanami Kaido now, but it is certainly more than I can remember. I will never tire of it! However, over the last 10 years, since I have been guiding cycling tours there, I have come to learn there is far more to the area than just taking the single Shimanami course. There are hundreds of islands to explore off the main route, and each island has alternatives that offer far less trafficked courses that the more serious cyclists will fall in love with. But as I always say, there is no point in rushing … it is a place to be in the moment, seeing, feeling, immersing.

Mukaishima

The first of the islands to cross on the Shimanami Kaido is Mukaishima. A quick 10-minute ferry ride from Onomichi on the mainland will carry you to the start of the main Shimanami course. Most cycle tourists will just 'follow the blue line' as the brochures direct you to. That's a great way to get started and you'll be sure to never get lost. It's a shame that most people just bypass gorgeous Mukaishima, including its epic (but short) climb to Takamiyama. There are several ways to do the climb, but either way, you'll be rewarded with views across the islands that stretch for miles, an architect-designed toilet block midway and an excellent spot for lunch.

Some years back, we, by chance, met with Kiryu san, who had spent time living and working in France. Since that day, one of our greatest treats has been to pay Kiryu san a visit at his gorgeously quaint restaurant, Les Dix Sept Bateaux on Mukaishima. It's the perfect place to refuel before tackling the 10-15 per cent Takamiyama. His savoury or sweet crepes are truly the best, but the restaurant's atmosphere is like stepping into a French noir movie. Classic French café music sets the mood; an old bicycle with baguettes in the basket out the front and chequered tablecloths on the cane furniture feel like sitting in the 9th Arrondissement. But you must book to get a seat … there are only seven or eight of them!

It's not all crepes and French food on the Shimanami. Seafood is, of course, the specialty of the area, and there are so many fabulous small cafes serving ridiculously cheap, sumptuous seafood dishes. But you really can't go past a steaming hot bowl of local ramen after a day of cycling. The area is famous for its noodle-style soup, and on any day, you will see queues lining up for a taste of the famous 'Onomichi ramen'. It is so famous, in fact, that people travel from out of town just for a bowl of the hearty broth. Dinner sorted; you'll need snacks from Hassaku Workshop Matsuura … the mere mention of their hassaku daifuku sends me into a dizzying whirl of longing! Our local cycle guide friend Akira got me addicted to these sweet treats of doughy mochi casing stuffed with fresh local citrus. The perfect sugar hit on a ride, and the explosion of the sweet, tangy juice inside is sublime.

Iwashijima

Accessed by 'the little red bridge' from Mukaishima, Iwashi is home to quiet farmlets of hundreds of spring onions, or negi as the locals call them. Iwashi, for me, is a hidden gem of the area – only 8km around but filled with quiet paths and pristine beaches. I remember my first visit to Iwashi and discovering the extraordinary tori gate on the beach … silently standing in the water. It has so much presence. Accessed by a small path off the mostly untrafficked main road, the red tori stands grandly in the water and is guarded by two stone 'komainu', or lion dogs. It truly feels like entering the domain of the gods.

Nestled into the bushes adjacent is a small shrine covered in illustrations of samurai fighting positions. A large suzu, or rope bell, hangs to wake the gods. On every visit to the area, this has become my 'must-go' location … peaceful, other-worldly, and quietly spectacular.

The Innoshima roller coaster

If hills are your thing, then the road less travelled on Innoshima is a must. Though none of the hills are large, they keep coming at you! The usual 'blue line' course for the Shimanami takes you around the island's west side, often referred to as 'Island Explorer'. However, the east side of the island involves tackling the 'advanced route' of the Suigun Skyline … and skyline it is! Roughly 15km of up-and-down roller coaster hills hugging the cliff side afford the most spectacular views. Islands floating in the distance, ships slowly rolling by, and small villages nestled into the inlets between each hill climb.

Views of the bridge at Tatara Cyclists' Sanctuary.

Shimanami Kaido Facts

START

Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture, or Imabari in Ehime Prefecture, although the usual start point is Onomichi as access is generally easier.

DISTANCE

Approximately 80km on the recommended route

VILLAGES ALONG THE WAY

- **Setoda on Ikuchijima** – approximately 30km from Onomichi.
- **Tatara Cyclists Sanctuary** – approximately 40km from Onomichi.
- **Kirosan Observatory Park** – approximately 65km from Onomichi, or 20km from Imabari.
- **Kurushima Kaikyo Bridge** – approximately 7km from Imabari.
- **Sunrise Itoyama** – approximately 5km from Imabari.

BIKE RENTAL

There are rental bike stations at both Onomichi and Imabari that offer everything from sit-up cruisers to e-bikes and high-end carbon road bikes.

More information shimanami-cycle.or.jp/cycling/en-02.html

ABOVE: Tina & friend at the Kirosan Observatory, Photo credit: Tim Lang.

It is a tough course for the unsuspecting tourist, and we've seen a few slugging it away in the pain cave as they realise they took the wrong turn. Averaging around 12 to 14 per cent on most of the short climbs. There are no facilities to speak of other than the occasional drop toilet, and it's best to take your own snack food and plenty of water. There is a multitude of peaceful and seemingly deserted locations to choose for a lunch stop, from small shrines in local villages to serene beaches with sea walls that make a great place to sit and doze, or there are a few small picnic areas on the cliff tops.

Sagishima

After an almost full circumnavigation of Innoshima, you can divert completely off the Shimanami for a secluded island experience. It might be secluded, but it has one of the best bakeries in the area … quality aside, it simply has crazy cheap prices and overwhelmingly friendly service. Run from the front room of a small house you'd be hard pressed to even spend ¥1000 (approximately $10) and not feel completely full… Sagi is worth the visit just for the bakery! From Innoshima, it's easy to catch a ferry from Shigei port on the west side of the island for a quick 20-minute ferry ride to Sagishima … bikes are totally okay on the ferry.

Maybe it's the 'realness' I love. Quiet roads with some awesome downhills, tracks that hug the sea wall past long abandoned holiday parks with pirate names, and we can't forget the resident guard pony … don't ever think you'll get a pat from this guy; he has serious 'short horse syndrome'! Best to keep your fingers away. Yes, lesson learnt!

Sagishima's population is said to be 71 per cent over 65, so don't expect things to move fast on the island. Famous for the many citrus groves and asparagus plantations and in Spring, the 1,000 Sakura tree plantation bursts into full bloom, creating a drawcard for locals. But it is the quietness I love. The road that hugs the coast has mini cliffs that look just like Japanese watercolour paintings, pine trees jutting precariously from the edges, and blue waves lapping below.

There is no question that both Ehime and Hiroshima Prefecture hold in their hands one of the most iconic cycling routes in the world. But if you are prepared to venture off the roads less travelled I think you can experience that 'real Japan' I first tasted all those years ago. As I cycle the area at least twice each year, I often imagine Motoko and her family toiling away in their small plantations of negi or citrus, hunkering down in the evenings for a taste of that fabulous home-cooked sukiyaki Motoko made for our family when I was a child. You can almost smell it as you ride through the villages, but more so, you can feel that welcoming hand of friendship that has grown since that very 'historical time'.

There are so many more places I could tell you about … but best I keep that a secret!

Tina McCarthy runs cycling tours to the Shimanami Kaido area through her company Wheel Women wheelwomen.com.au
Ride Experience/Bicycle Tours Japan runs cycling tours in Japan, including custom tours to Shimanami Kaido bicycle-tours.jp/

Keirin: Japan's post-war 'gamble'

Fast, colourful and enigmatic, Japan has a complicated relationship with the high-octane world of keirin racing, as Peter Maniaty explores.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

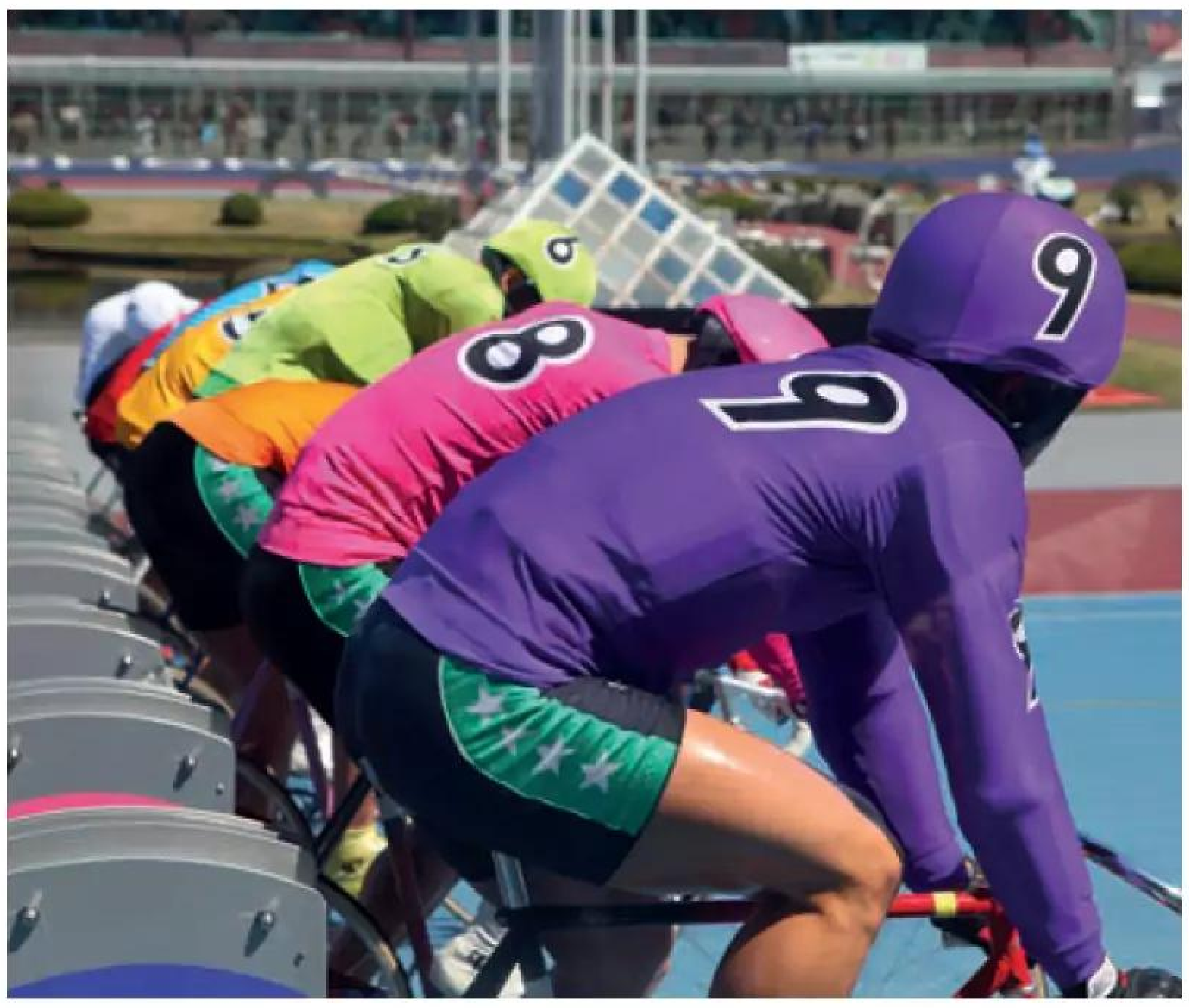
ABOVE: At this stage of the race the racers have to remain behind the pacer (in blue and orange).

This is the second time I've set out to write this story. The first happened more than a decade ago, but ended almost as quickly as it began. For when I approached the Japan Tourism Agency for assistance their response was decidedly cool. The more I probed, the more they (very politely) obfuscated. In time, I realised why. Keirin racing, for its considerable tradition and popularity in Japan, also carries an unfortunate social stigma. In stark contrast to the vibrant, Wiggles-like jerseys and helmets worn by the riders, the sport itself is considered murky. A little grubby. Not something the powers that be in Japan are especially proud of. A subculture, through and through.

It's a tale brilliantly told in the 2022 book, *War on Wheels: Inside Keirin & Japan's Cycling Subculture* by Tokyo-based British journalist, Justin McCurry, who ventures: "Mainstream Japanese society (has long) looked down its collective nose at the velodromes and the men who frequent them ... for all its popularity with punters, keirin has only been able to retain its place in Japan's sporting firmament through a grudging acceptance that the benefits it brings to local economies – and its undeniable spectacle as a sport – eclipse concerns over the corruption of public morals." Like I said, it's complicated.

The history

The origins of keirin racing can be traced back to the rebuilding of Japanese society after WW2. To help stimulate depressed local economies, governments built velodromes and made keirin racing one of just a handful of sports the public could legally gamble on (still the case today),



ABOVE: The majority of the public remains in a separate building away from the race track and focuses on betting.

RIGHT: The start of the Keirin race in Ōmiya in the greater Tokyo area.

Photo credit: Paul Keller.

with the bulk of the proceeds invested back into public infrastructure.

Kokura in the southern Japanese city of Kitakyushu (incidentally, the original target for the second atomic bomb in 1945) hosted the first-ever keirin race in November 1948. Others soon followed across Japan, despite keirin's early years often marred by violence, race-fixing and the involvement of Yakuza crime syndicates. At its peak, there were more than 70 active keirin velodromes in Japan. Today, there are still forty-three, hosting competitions for men and women everywhere from Hokkaido in the north to Kyushu in the south, and keirin remains big business. How big? In 2023, more than ¥1.2 trillion was wagered on keirin racing in Japan. That's around AUD$14 billion.

The racing

The name and format may be similar, with riders speeding up gradually behind a pace-maker before being released for a frenetic surge to the finish line. But Japanese keirin is a very different beast from its international sibling, which first appeared at the UCI Track World Championships in 1980 for men and 2002 for women.

For starters, the cavernous, eerily empty velodromes in Japan are larger and flatter than their international counterparts, typically between 330-500 metres long. The field sizes are bigger with nine riders in men's races and seven in women's events. The racing is often considerably more physical, especially in the men's events where blocking, hooking, shoulder barging and even head butts are common practice. Shaped by a complex tapestry of traditions, the tactics are also highly nuanced with riders obliged to announce their intended strategy prior to racing, with penalties and even disqualification for those who fail to adhere or causing another rider to crash.

Race distances are considerably longer. The shortest events for men and women are around 1,600 metres, with the bulk of men's events held over 2,000m. Finals for major events can stretch to 2,400m, while the men's season-ending Keirin Grand Prix is contested over a whopping 2,800m – nearly double the distance of a UCI keirin (1,500m). Race meets, typically held over four days, are also conducted under strict lockdown conditions for riders. No phones. No internet. No contact with the outside world.

The riders

Japanese keirin generally comprises three different kinds of riders who rely on different strategies to secure victory. Senko ride at the front and attack from long range, often with as much as 800m still to go. Makuri sit second wheel and usually protect the Senko rider, before starting their own sprint from about 200-400m out. Oikomi are third wheel and block hard for the Makuri and the Senko if someone tries to sneak past, before unleashing a short sprint in the closing metres. One of the strongest traditions, respect for your elders, sees younger riders often going first, sacrificing themselves for the older riders behind.

The equipment

In stark contrast to the technological arms race we witness each Olympic cycle, keirin in Japan is all about the riders, not their bikes. Given the central role of gambling, integrity is critical and the JKA (Japan Keirin Autorace Foundation) enforces a strict system of standards to ensure no rider gains an unfair advantage based on equipment. All bikes, for example, must be handmade by a certified builder using chromoly steel and approved components only.

The school

Regardless of your talent – you could be Harrie Lavreysen or Joe Bloggs as far the JKA is concerned – you can't simply race keirin in Japan. First you must gain your racing licence. For Japanese-born riders, this means completing 11 months of live-in study at the legendary Keirin School in Shuzenji, about 110km south-west of Tokyo. Here riders learn everything from the rules, tactics and traditions of keirin to how to best care for their bikes and their body. The JKA does accommodate a select number of hand-invited international riders, allowing them to race after completing abbreviated 'educations' at Keirin School, usually no more than a couple of weeks. However, foreigners are not permitted to compete in the highest tier of events.

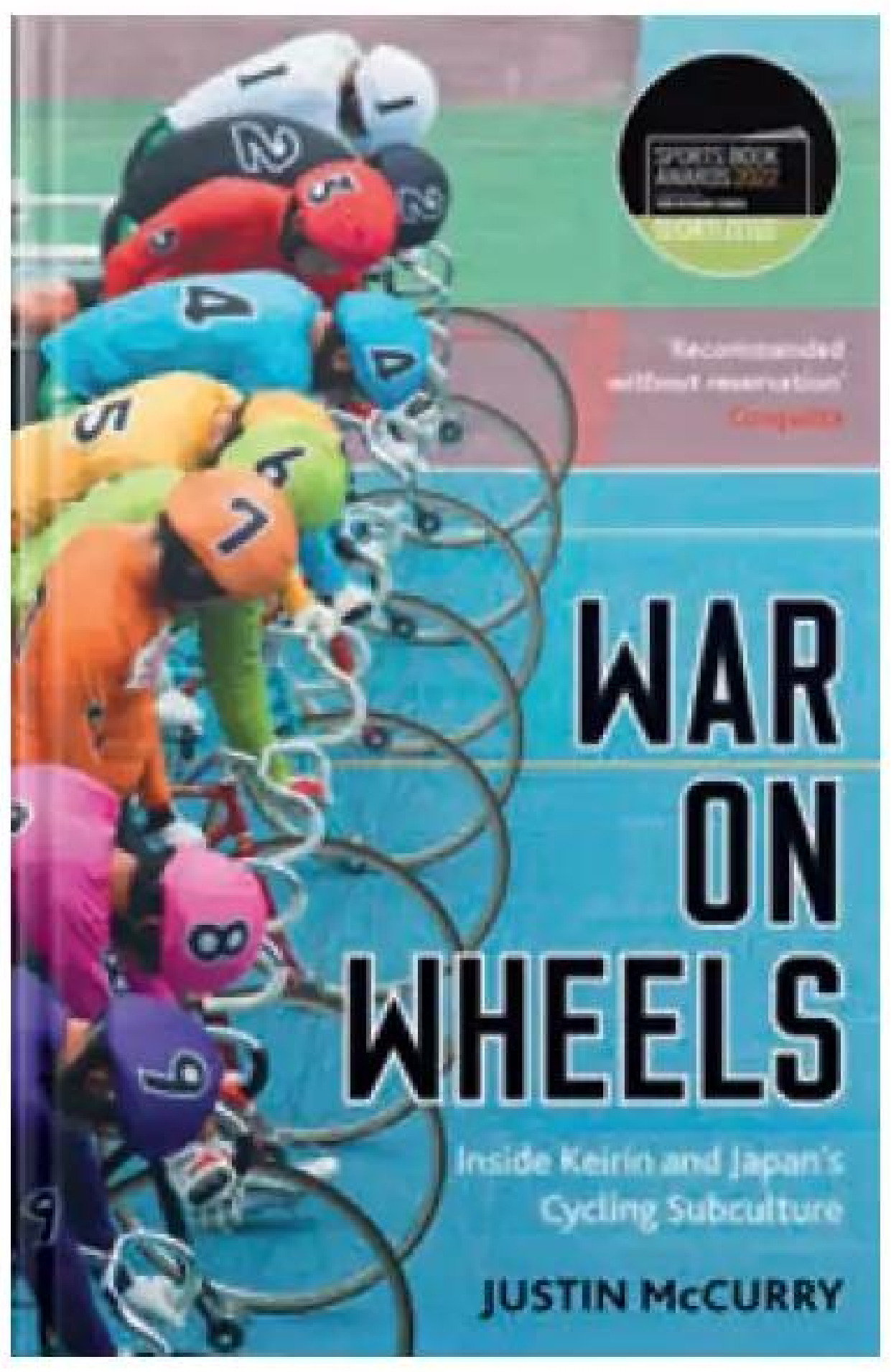
The rankings

Japan has almost 2,500 professional keirin riders spanning a wide range of abilities, records and ages. The vast majority are still men, however, women's keirin (reinstated in 2012 after being scrapped back in 1964 due to "lack of interest") is growing in popularity with a current pool of around 175 riders. A points-based ranking system is used to determine who is allowed to compete in which races – and who isn't. In simple terms, the better you perform, the higher your ranking will become. The holy grail of keirin rankings is known as 'SS', a revered status bestowed upon the top nine points earners. Only these riders get to compete in the year-ending Keirin Grand Prix, where prize money can be more than ¥100 million, or close to AUD $1 million.

The internationals

Given the lucrative prize-money on offer, it's no surprise numerous international track sprinters have sought to compete in Japan. Sir Chris Hoy raced briefly back in 2005, less than a year after being crowned Olympic Champion in the Kilo in Athens (Hoy would go on to be Keirin World Champion four times). France's two-time Keirin World Champion, Francois Pervis, has raced regularly in Japan since 2010. Australia's Shane Perkins and Kaarle McCulloch have also completed stints in Japan, with Perkins earning himself the nickname 'The Magician' for his ability to evade the best efforts of blockers.

Just as it has proved challenging for internationals to 'crack' keirin in Japan, the reverse has also been true. Despite thousands of Japanese athletes holding licences, it has only occasionally translated to success on the world stage. For decades, Japan was conspicuously, and somewhat paradoxically, absent from the highest echelons of international keirin racing – the one exception being the 1987 UCI World Championships in Vienna where Harumi Honda took gold ahead of Italy's Claudio Golinelli. However, things are now changing. In fact, for the first time Japan ended 2024 with the UCI World Champions in both the men's (Kento Yamasaki) and women's (Mina Sato) keirin. Japan is still waiting for its first Olympic Champion, with its best result coming at the 2008 Beijing Games when Kiyofumi Nagai claimed bronze.



ABOVE: War on Wheels: Inside Keirin & Japan's Cycling Subculture, Justin McCurry. profilebooks.com/work/war-on-wheels

BELOW: The last metres of a Keirin race in Ōmiya in the greater Tokyo area.

Gravel destination: Mudgee

The Central West NSW town of Mudgee is the ideal location for a gravel riding getaway.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

Gravel riding is growing in popularity, with manufacturers creating bikes specifically for gravel and all the gear that goes with it. For riders, it gives us the opportunity to explore new places on quiet country roads that were previously not accessible to roadies like me.

My partner and I are devoted road cyclists and haven't done much offroad cycling, so with a small amount of trepidation, we packed up an Orbea Terra gravel bike (see separate review) each and headed to the NSW Central West town of Mudgee.

We've visited Mudgee many times before, including our annual pilgrimage to the Mudgee Classic run by this title. We've both completed the road ride on Sunday, but never the Dirty Mudgee gravel ride on Saturday.

For those who haven't been, it's a popular destination for wine and food lovers, as well as keen cyclists. It boasts over 35 wineries in the surrounding area, with cellar doors and restaurants. The town hosts many pubs, restaurants, cafes, and a wide range of accommodation to suit everyone's taste and budget.

Gravel riding benefits

The greatest benefit of riding on gravel roads is the option to explore quiet roads that traverse farmland, natural bushland, and much more. And there is very little vehicle traffic on dirt roads. During our Mudgee rides, we saw no more than 10 vehicles over four days! But we did see kangaroos, lizards, farm animals, and a few friendly locals.

Due to the loose surface and ever-changing terrain, gravel riding employs different skills than regular road riding. Those newly developed skills can translate into road riding, making you a better all-round cyclist.

Taking up a new riding discipline also gives you the perfect excuse to buy a new bike – not that you really need one! You can ride a road bike on smooth gravel, but a gravel bike is designed for off-road use with its comfortable geometry, generous gearing, and greater tyre clearances. Our Orbea Terras were ideal for the Mudgee gravel roads.

Gravel rides

The focus of our four-day visit was riding the gravel rides throughout the area, including the Dirty Mudgee course, an out-and-back ride to Gulgong, and generally exploring.

There are many gravel roads near Mudgee and its surrounds. We explored some of the popular routes, and there are plenty more.

Riding the Dirty Mudgee course on the Orbea Terra gravel bike.

Welcome to
GULGONG

ABOVE: Visiting the historic town of Gulgong via gravel roads.

DIRTY MUDGEE COURSE

This 55 km loop is the annual Dirty Mudgee ride route, which forms part of the Mudgee Classic.

To begin the ride, head out of town on the Castlereagh Highway towards Gulgong and turn right into Putta Bucca Road. It becomes a gravel road when you reach Tinja Lane, which will take you past stunning farmland and vineyards.

Several times during the ride, you'll return to the bitumen on Henry Lawson Drive, which links up the gravel sections, including Strikes Lane, Black Springs Road, Drews Lane, Wilbetree Road and Snakes Creek Road.

Most of the gravel is relatively smooth, and there are several climbs and descents along the route, but overall, there is just 670m of climbing.

cyclingclassics.com.au/mudgee/dirtymudgee

CENTRAL WEST CYCLE TRAIL

The Central West Cycle (CwC) trail is a 400km loop around the central west of NSW. It is designed to give cyclists a week-long ride through the Central West region and breathe life into the small villages and towns.

As our visit to the area was focused on Mudgee, we completed only the first leg of the CwC, a 30km stretch primarily on gravel roads from Mudgee to Gulgong.

The CwC is signposted and easy to follow. You ride out of Mudgee on the Castlereagh Highway towards Gulgong and turn right onto Wilbetree Road, about 2.4km from the CBD.

Wilbetree soon becomes smooth gravel. About 19km into the ride, turn left at the Canadian Lead Road and continue to Gulgong. Gulgong was a gold rush town that is now focused on tourism, with interesting museums, cafes, and pubs to visit.

centralwestcycletrail.com.au

OTHER MUDGEE GRAVEL

We also did some general exploring of other dirt roads around the area.

One of our favourite areas was near the Mudgee airport and cemetery. Head north across the river on Ulan Road and follow it until you see the airport on your left and the cemetery on your right. Turn just before the cemetery into Mt Pleasant Lane and explore the dead-end and loop roads like Edgell Lane, Mt Pleasant Lane, Buckaroo Road and adjoining roads.

Where to eat and drink

Like many regional towns in Australia, Mudgee has plenty of pubs. Choose the Court House if you want to step back in time and drink with the locals, the trendy Woolpack if you like dumplings, the Lawson Park for a superb steak, Kelly's Irish pub for a traditional stew or Guinness Pie, or the Paragon for its excellent beer garden.

Great cafes include Alby & Esthers, tucked away in a laneway off Market Street, Millbrie, The Corner Store and Outside the Square.

For winery cellar doors, some of the most popular include Logan Wines, First Ridge, Huntington, Robert Stein Winery, Bunnamagoo and Lowe Wine. There are also some great smaller options – Walter Wines, Heslop Wines, Slowfox and 791 Estate.

If breweries are more your style, there is Three Tails Brewery in the CBD, or Small Batch and Mudgee Brewing Co are also worth a visit.

Many of the wineries include restaurants, and if you'd prefer to eat in Mudgee, try Gigi's restaurant, located at The Clairfield on Sydney Road. Gigi's focuses on fresh produce that is presented with generous portions. Popular winery restaurants are The Barn at Blue Wren, a great lunch or dinner spot, and The Zin House, a hatted restaurant with a great kitchen and garden-style dining experience at Lowe Family Wines.

Accommodation

Mudgee has many accommodation options, including hotels, motels, B&Bs, and more. We stayed at The Clairfield, a recently refurbished hotel conveniently located on the edge of the CBD. Mudgee Region Tourism can assist with accommodation options.

Other things to do

The Mudgee region also has some great walks. The Mudgee Sculpture Walk is in town and a great walk that links to Putta Bucca Wetlands – a good, easy town bike ride. For families, this precinct also now includes a pump track for children to ride any type of bike.

A day trip to the nearby township of Rylstone can include a visit to Ferntree Gully or Ganguddy-Dunns Swamp, where bushwalking, swimming, and kayak hire or guided kayak tours are available.

To relax after riding or other activities, visit Jila at The Clairfield for an infrared sauna and float therapy session.

Mudgee is a great destination for gravel riding on its many backroads, and you can also enjoy all it has to offer off the bike. BA

***Bicycling Australia* stayed at The Clairfield Hotel as guests during our visit to Mudgee. theclairfieldhotel.com.au**

Gravel riding tips

Tyres: You'll need wider and grippier tyres, matched to the gravel

Shoes & pedals: Mountain bike shoes & pedals work best for gravel

Navigation: Preload your bike computer with maps for navigation

First Aid: Always carry the basics with you because gravel riding is less predictable

Cornering: Look ahead and choose the smoothest part, avoiding the loose stuff

Stay loose and relaxed: Don't overreact to the bike moving under you

Tyre pressure: Lower your tyre pressure

BELOW: Mudgee is a picturesque location for a rural getaway to ride gravel. Credit: Mudgee Region Tourism.

The Fast & the Furious

Queensland's Kaden Groves has made quite a name for himself as a WorldTour sprinter. We catch up with the Alpecin-Deceuninck speed demon to hear his story and to find out where his sprint leads him from here.

WORDS: STEVE THOMAS

With a double shot of triple Vuelta a' Espana stage wins and points classification victories to his name, the Gympie-raised 26-year-old Kaden Groves is rapidly becoming recognised as one of the fastest sprinters in the pro peloton and getting faster with every season. We caught up with him to learn more.

How did you get into cycling?

I had an accident racing motorbikes – a knee injury involving my ACL and a few fractures in my knee, and for recovery, I started cycling at the physio's, and I took a liking to it and never looked back. Starting from about 2015 I really started taking my cycling seriously.

What was it about cycling that gripped you?

I just really enjoyed the physical aspects, and it's also a team sport which is nice. It's a unique sport in that there's not too much else like it, in that it's a team sport but with individual roles and completely different riders, and I just really enjoyed it, and obviously I was doing quite okay at it too, which I think comes with more enjoyment.

Was it always about road racing only?

It was more or less all in for the road. I tried a bit at the track at state level, but the Australian Track Academy has historically always been at such a high level, and so I never made that team to race a team pursuit or potentially the Olympics. As that never happened, I could then fully direct my focus on the road. But I would maybe like to go back on the track someday, or do a couple of six days or something, to mix up the disciplines.

What kind of a rider are you with training?

Starting out was more old school, and cycling has changed a lot since then, and it's going more and more with science, numbers and weight, but starting out, we just kept it fun and the hours low, so as not to burn myself out.

Obviously now, with Alpecin-Deceuninck it's a super structured team with a very good performance staff, and now it has gone as scientific as possible, especially around the sprint training, which is kind of a focus for us.

Does the focus on numbers kill the enjoyment of training?

I enjoy training. It's good to see a process of preparing for a race, which I think is why many cyclists are pro – they like to see a project and work towards the big goals. You need to enjoy that process; otherwise, you'd probably not have a long career if you were dreading the training every day. You need to find that balance, and look after the mental side too.

TOP: Groves takes the win on Stage 17 of the 2024 Vuelta a España. **ABOVE:** Groves won the Green Sprinters jersey at the 2024 Vuelta a España.

Is your training handled by the team?

At Alpecin-Deceuninck we have one dedicated coach, but there is a team of performance staff to make sure we're all on the same page.

Was racing in Asia a stepping-stone to Europe for you?

It was a good stepping-stone for me. The standard is lower in Asia, and the roads are bigger, and those technical aspects make the racing easier. For example, when you're on a highway in China instead of racing on a narrow Belgian road, the style of racing is very different.

For me it was good to be competitive in Asia first, and then when I went to Europe it took me about 1.5 years to adapt and get used to that aggressive style of racing, and also to being 18-19 years old and living in Italy. It's eye opening and pretty difficult, but if you have the right people around you it can be a nice experience.

What was the door to Europe, was it through GreenEdge or SEG Racing?

It was done between both. Getting to Europe was through the GreenEdge team. I had a contact with SEG in Europe, which allowed me to stop there, and 2019 with them was a breakthrough year for me. They were one of the best development teams at the time and well known for developing WorldTour riders.

You can see my progression quite clearly, from starting out in Australia, then stepping to St George, and then to a good development team, then to SEG – I've been quite lucky in having the right people directing me in the right direction at the right time.

Were you always considered a sprinter?

I never really felt much pressure from anyone to go in a certain way. Even now, we're still trying to learn what I can do as a rider; not as in keeping the options open, but in not shutting out or writing something completely off now. I've always had a sprint focus, but not as in being a pure sprinter with that the only thing I had to do.

You can get over the climbs better than many sprinters, is that something you also factor in?

Yes, it means that I can get to the finish line in more races. We certainly do monitor the weight with the team, especially when going to a race like the Vuelta, where there is a lot of climbing stages in a row, it's about getting the body in the right composition for the race. At the Giro you can go there a bit heavier, because you need to be faster in the sprints.

Was there a difference when you moved from GreenEdge to Alpecin?

There wasn't a great shift. Both teams have a great culture, and Australians get on with the Belgian and Dutch mentality. They're honest people, and you can be totally transparent.

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ABOVE: Groves at Stage 5 of the 2023 Vuelta a España.

ABOVE RIGHT: Victory on Stage 2 of the 2024 Vuelta a España.

> “IT WAS GOOD TO SEE JAY VINE, BEN O’CONNOR, AND MYSELF UP THERE. IT WAS A REALLY SUCCESSFUL TOUR FOR AUSTRALIA.”

Everyone is so direct and all work towards the same thing. Along with that, Alpecin-Deceuninck is a very structured team, whereas GreenEdge was more relaxed in some ways, be that directors or training camps, whereas at Alpecin we’re doing all of the one-percenters, trying to get absolutely everything out of each rider as best we can.

You’ve had success at the Vuelta, what is it about it that works so well?

We don’t really know. I think that it takes my body a few training camps to get in the best shape. I find that if I do an early altitude camp, after the first one of the year I don’t really get much benefit, but after the second or third it improves my shape a lot.

The other thing about the Vuelta, it’s a bit of a strange race, where a lot of people are not so motivated for it, it’s been a long year. So, I know that if I can go there really motivated I can be successful, just because of the timing during the year, and also the characteristics of the race suit me, with the harder days, reduced bunch sprints because over the three weeks it’s generally harder, and I think that suits me.

In the 2024 Vuelta, you were going head-to-head with van Aert, and he crashed out. How was that for you?

It was a shame because you never want to win a jersey because of someone crashing. But it was always a focus for us to try and be as high in the classification as possible, especially after winning it the previous year, and you can’t say no to a points jersey; somebody has to lead the classification, and that was a shame.

We went there to win stages; you win stages and the points go with that. To win two stages against Wout at that time was already a massive confidence boost for the team, and then to win again on stage 17 was a really big highlight for us.

What was it like having three Aussies in the Vuelta leader’s jerseys at one point?

It was definitely a special day. It’s good to see the level of Australian cycling. We’re not known for being a cycling country, although we produce good cyclists. Australia is a really big team sport country, with rugby, cricket, and football, so it was good to see the level there. It was good to see Jay Vine, Ben O’Connor, and myself up there. It was a really successful tour for Australia.

The race planning and schedule, how does that all work?

It’s a combined effort, and the team are really flexible with me. The only thing we can’t really decide or say is that I must do the Tour de France, and I can’t just say I want to be the leader for the team – but they are really flexible. If I asked to do Paris-Roubaix with MVDP for example then they’d be in for that, because they also want riders in those races who can help. But at the end of the day, it’s ultimately down to them, and I trust the process and will follow the plan.

They put me in races that suit me the best, and we want to win as much as possible, so they will pick the schedule to get the most wins we can.

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Looking back on 100 years and bold plans for the future

From printing to publishing, Yaffa Media has always been about its people and niche audiences. In 2014 it acquired *Bicycling Australia* and has since launched the gran fondo Classics events. Founded in 1925, it proudly celebrates a centenary of storytelling.

David Yaffa Snr.

Founded on Friendship

Vision, strength of character and an irresistible personality enabled David Yaffa to become a key player in the media industry.

Yaffa Syndicate Pty Ltd was incorporated in 1925, but it had been five years in the making for the founder David Yaffa. Born in Sydney in 1893, David Yaffa Snr was the son of immigrants from Latvia. He attended Fort Street High School and went on to be a successful salesman for an importing company. This most likely gave him some entrepreneurial ideas about what he could import and sell in Australia.

He decided to specialise in products and services for the newspaper industry, which was the dominant advertising medium at the time – radio would not launch for a few years yet, and television was decades away.

In 1920, aged 27, he went to the USA where he secured the Australian agency for the Underwood Photo Service, and on his return set up a small office in Pitt Street. More travel and more agency deals followed, with Yaffa also representing other companies from America and Britain. Soon he was selling Australian rights to not just photographs but also news articles, feature writing, fiction and comics. He imported the first American comic strip into Australia and through his services Australian readers were introduced to leading feature writers from American and British publications.

Before long Yaffa Syndicate controlled Australasian distribution of features from world-famous services in the USA, UK, South Africa and Europe, and had offices in the US, UK and New Zealand.

His obituary in *Newspaper News* stated: "Olden generations would have sensed the secret of Mr Yaffa's remarkable success in a fairy godmother's gift at birth of the Golden Magnet of Friendship. Always – in Australia and New Zealand, in Britain and the Continent, Canada and the United States – he drew friends irresistibly, and was possessed of a genius for dissolving disputes and for acting as arbitrator."

In tributes after his death in 1947 aged only 54, a common theme came through. He wore out a lot of shoe leather selling his services personally to the newspaper proprietors, and became well known for his great friendship, hospitality and negotiating skills. It was a remarkable achievement that from humble beginnings he soon became 'one of the boys' with the heavyweights of the Australian newspaper establishment. How did he do it? Through his forever friendly personality, business acumen and, according his grandson Max Yaffa, through "partying them to death".

Sir Keith Murdoch, chairman of the *Herald & Weekly Times* and father of Rupert Murdoch, issued this tribute: "For 25 years I have known Dave Yaffa as a kindly, busy, progressive man, with plenty of pluck for adventurous business. He gave these years of service to the newspaper industry and wore himself out in the process."

Another tribute came from Frank Packer of Consolidated Press: "Mr Yaffa was in all ways a man and a friend to be proud of. His ability and business acumen were recognised by all working newspaper executives of Australia, England and America. No-one had ever before occupied his unique position in Australian journalism and commanded the wide respect he did."

David Yaffa was the negotiator for many important newspaper deals, including the sale of the *Daily Telegraph* from Associated Press to the Packer-controlled Consolidated Press in 1936. He had a very close relationship with Frank Packer – he helped Packer with the launch of the *Australian Women's Weekly* in 1933.

International Connections

The first products to be sold by David Yaffa under licence in Australia were photographs. His continual knocking on the doors of newspaper offices began to pay off.

Before long, newspaper pages across the country were publishing photographs with the credit line YAFFA on them. Many were what we would today call stock images, particularly photographs used in advertisements, but as radio technology improved photos for news stories were sent by cable, the early equivalent of the fax machine. They were referred to as radio pictures, radio photographs or picturegrams. And with instant transmission they were in great demand for use alongside the latest news stories.

Some newspapers were slow to adapt to the new technology and did not establish early connections with news services overseas. This left an opening for David Yaffa who on his early trips to America and Britain established links with overseas news services. Soon he was providing a news service to newspapers in Australia and New Zealand, syndicating news and feature articles as well as photographs. Syndicated news stories also carried the credit line YAFFA.

Yaffa Syndicate offices were established in New York, London and Wellington. The Yaffa Syndicate represented US firms Underwoods and

McClure's, and the UK firms Newnes, Odhams and Punch, controlling Australasian distribution of feature stories from publishing companies in the USA, UK, South Africa and Europe. Through this syndication service Australian readers were introduced to the leading feature writers of publications such as *Life, Time, Fortune, The New Yorker* and *Punch*.

Comics, too, were big business. Yaffa imported the first American comic strip into Australia, *The Clancy Kids* by Percy Crosby, and went on to syndicate a multitude of famous comic strips including *Popeye, Blondie, Mandrake, Speed Gordon, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Dick Tracy, Superman, Dagwood, Orphan Annie* and *Henry The Little King*. Fortunately, with some persuasion from David Yaffa no doubt, newspaper publishers everywhere recognised that the comic strip was an essential ingredient for readers who became strong followers of their favourite comic characters. Hearst-owned King Features Inc of New York was one of Yaffa's largest suppliers with comics in nearly every newspaper in Australasia.

Newspaper News

In 1928 David Yaffa launched *Newspaper News*, a monthly trade publication that enabled him to stay even closer to his newspaper friends and clients. It was only the second publication in the world of its kind (the first was in Canada, called *Marketing*). It was also great timing – newspapers reached their peak in Australia in the 1920s with 23 metropolitan dailies in print in 1926; today there are ten.

Making use of its international connections, *Newspaper News* published the latest developments in advertising, radio, newspapers and newsprint, sourced out of the cable news services in his New York and London offices. This kept Australasian newspaper, advertising and marketing executives up to date with international trends and developments in their industries.

In addition to overseas news about media and marketing, *Newspaper News* published quirky side stories such as one about a journalist who was knocked over by a bus and wrote his own obituary as he lay dying on the footpath. Talk about gutter journalism!

Locally it covered news and features about Australasian media, advertisers, advertising agencies and printing technology. Companies operating in these sectors found that not only was the content useful for their own businesses but also for their clients. It followed that if advertisers such as Colgate-Palmolive and Reckitt & Colman were reading it, then advertising agencies and the media would want to advertise in it to attract business from them. The media would also advertise in it to attract business from advertising agencies, and suppliers would advertise for business from anyone.

In the heart of the CBD

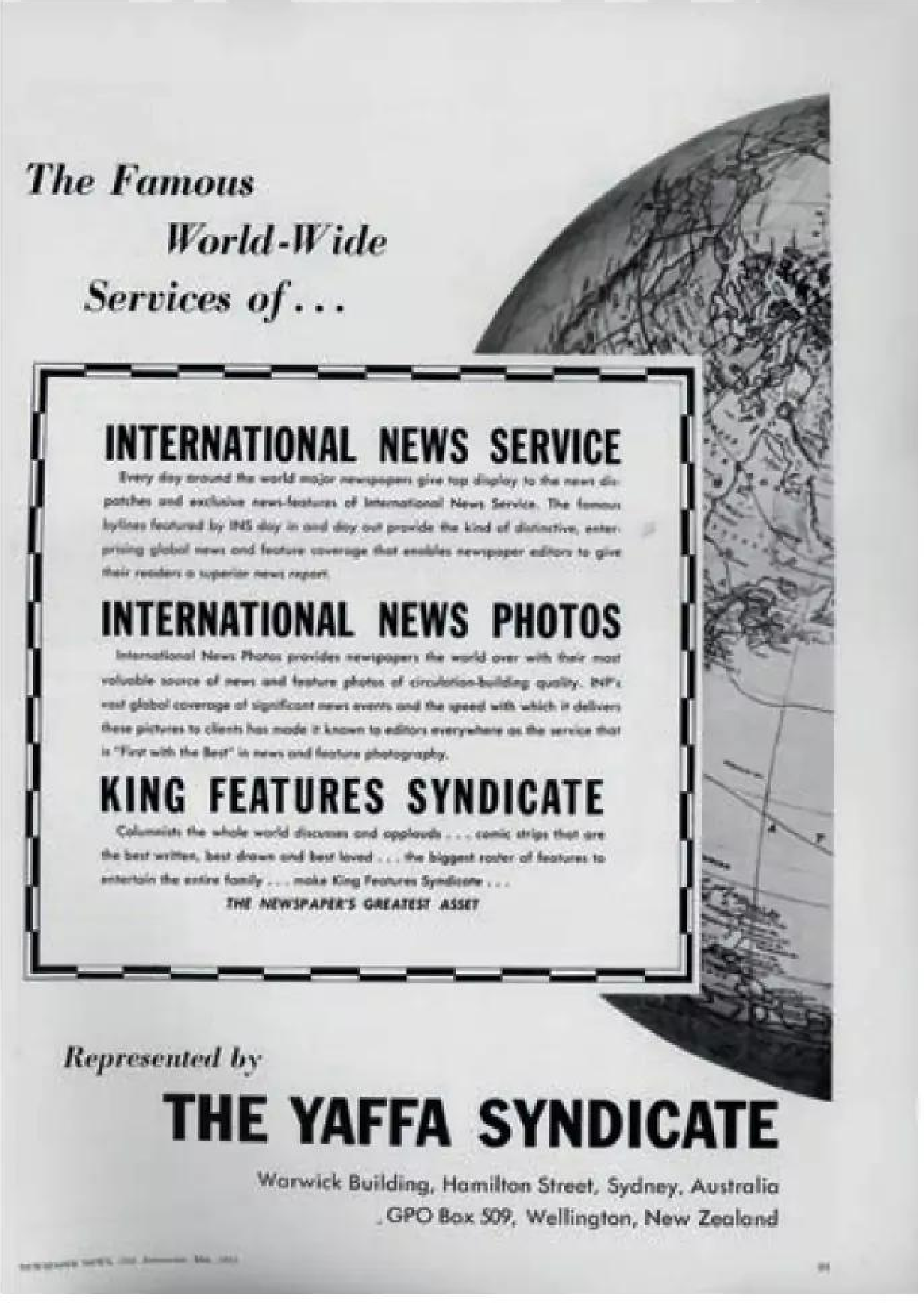
With business booming for both *Newspaper News* and the Yaffa Syndicate, larger and more appropriate premises were needed. In 1934 the company moved into new offices on the top floor of the Warwick Building at 13-17 Hamilton Street in the middle of Sydney's CBD. Also in this building were the editorial and production departments of *The Sydney Mail*, a weekly magazine published by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while in the next door building on Hunter Street were the offices of the *Sydney Morning Herald* – talk about getting close to your clients!

David Yaffa continued his overseas travels in the 1930s to cement relationships with clients in the US and UK, but with the onset of war he had his own battles to fight. In March 1940 the Australian Journalists' Association lodged a complaint with the Federal Government about "the great harm inflicted upon Australian industry by the importation from overseas of cheap syndicated press material". The main argument was that local artists and authors were being deprived of work, and that the syndication of overseas material was "a menace to the cultural and industrial standards of Australia created by the practice by which wealthy newspaper proprietors in this country are importing syndicated copy and drawings." The government duly banned the importation of comic strips and other artwork for printing newspaper supplements that had been created overseas.

This naturally galvanised David Yaffa into action. Apart from the comic strips he was deriving good business from selling newspaper supplements. In a letter to the Minister for Customs he explained how in July 1939 he had been commissioned by Consolidated Press "to go to America to prepare and purchase ready printed colour comics. On their behalf I made a contract with the Acme Colorprint Coy and the first shipment left America three days after my arrival and landed in Sydney about the time war broke out."

He marshalled his newspaper proprietor friends to lobby the government and a flurry of letters and telegrams from the publishers followed. He wrote regularly to the Minister for Customs and other Ministers. Frank Packer wrote to the Trade and Customs Minister pointing out inconsistencies in their rulings affecting Consolidated Press. Not all newspaper publishers, however, were prepared to join the argument, saying that all their energies would be devoted to the war effort.

Despite all the lobbying the ban continued – there was a war on, after all – but it was still in place when David Yaffa died in 1947. Lobbying can be an exhausting process, perhaps it contributed to his early death.



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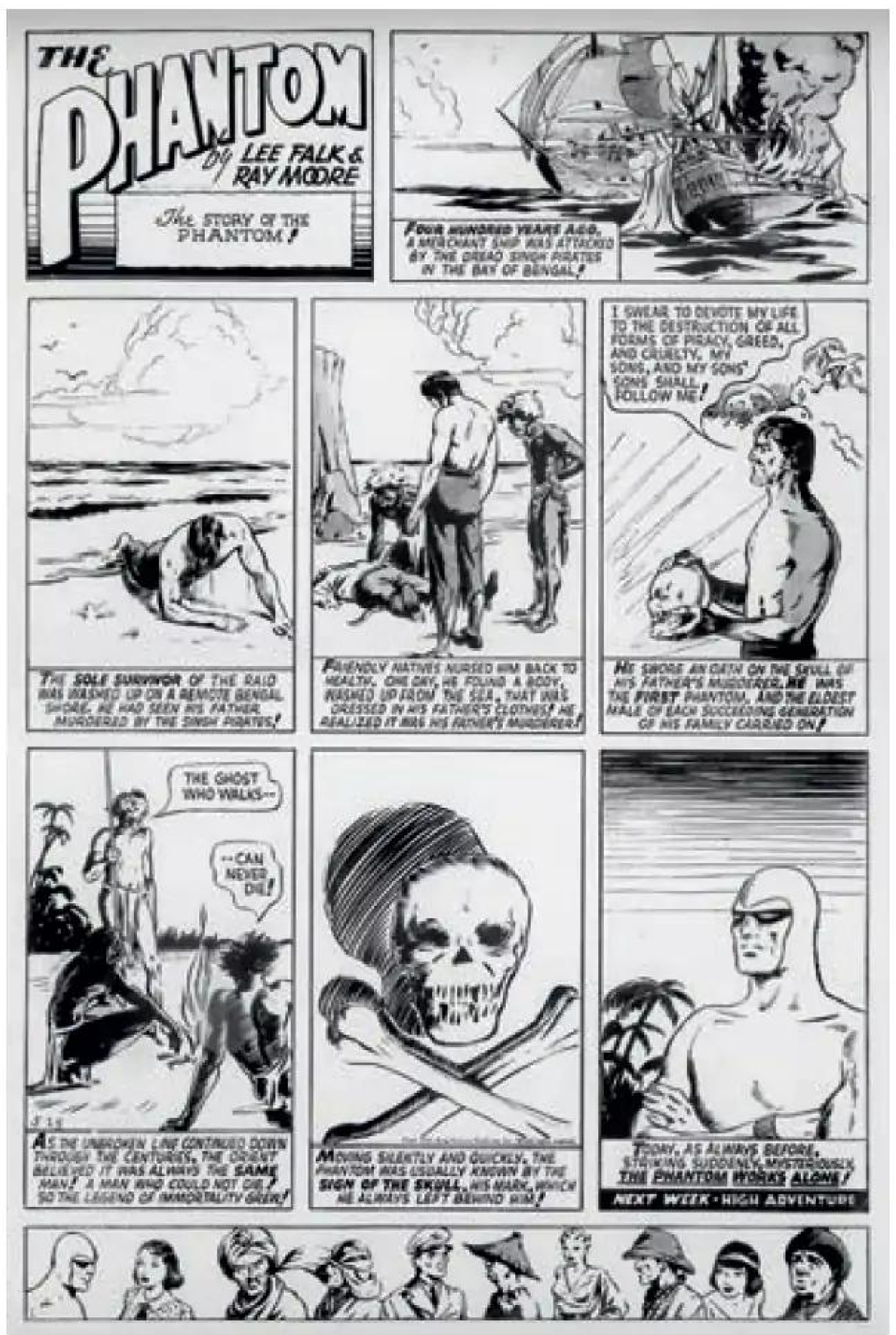
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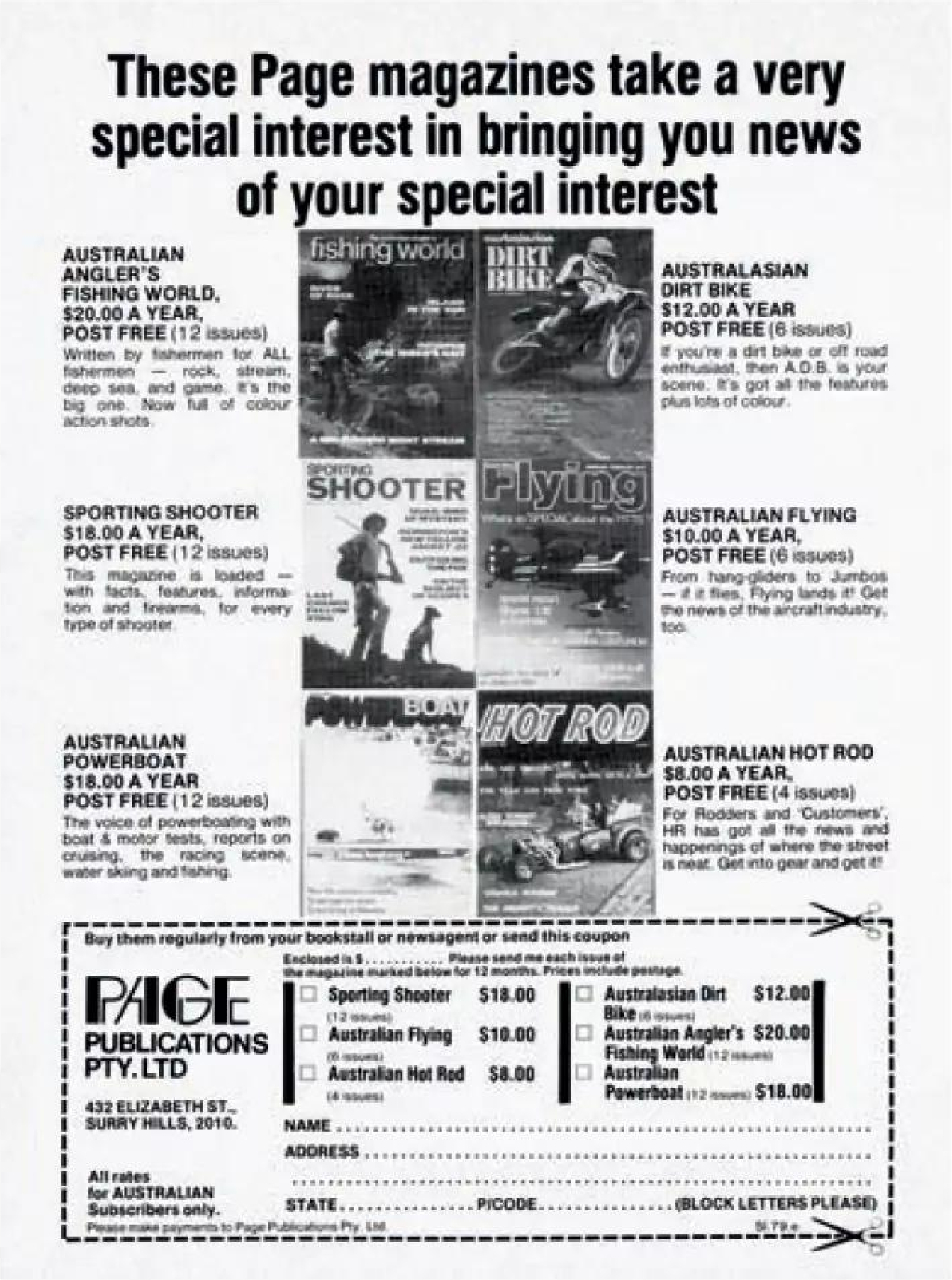

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Left to right: newspaper article with Yaffa credit line; *Phantom* comic circa 1930s; ad from *Newspaper News*.

A Player In Print

In 1940 David Yaffa bought a newspaper press from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and converted it to four colour printing. This was the start of the company's commercial printing operations.

Prior to 1940, *Newspaper News* would have been printed by outside printers, possibly by the *Herald* on the same press purchased by Yaffa. The newly-acquired press, a newspaper rotary letterpress machine, was installed in the basement of the Warwick Building along with binding and stereotype departments, a loading dock and a crane. With an emphasis now on printing, a new company, The Rotary Colorprint Pty Ltd, was set up.

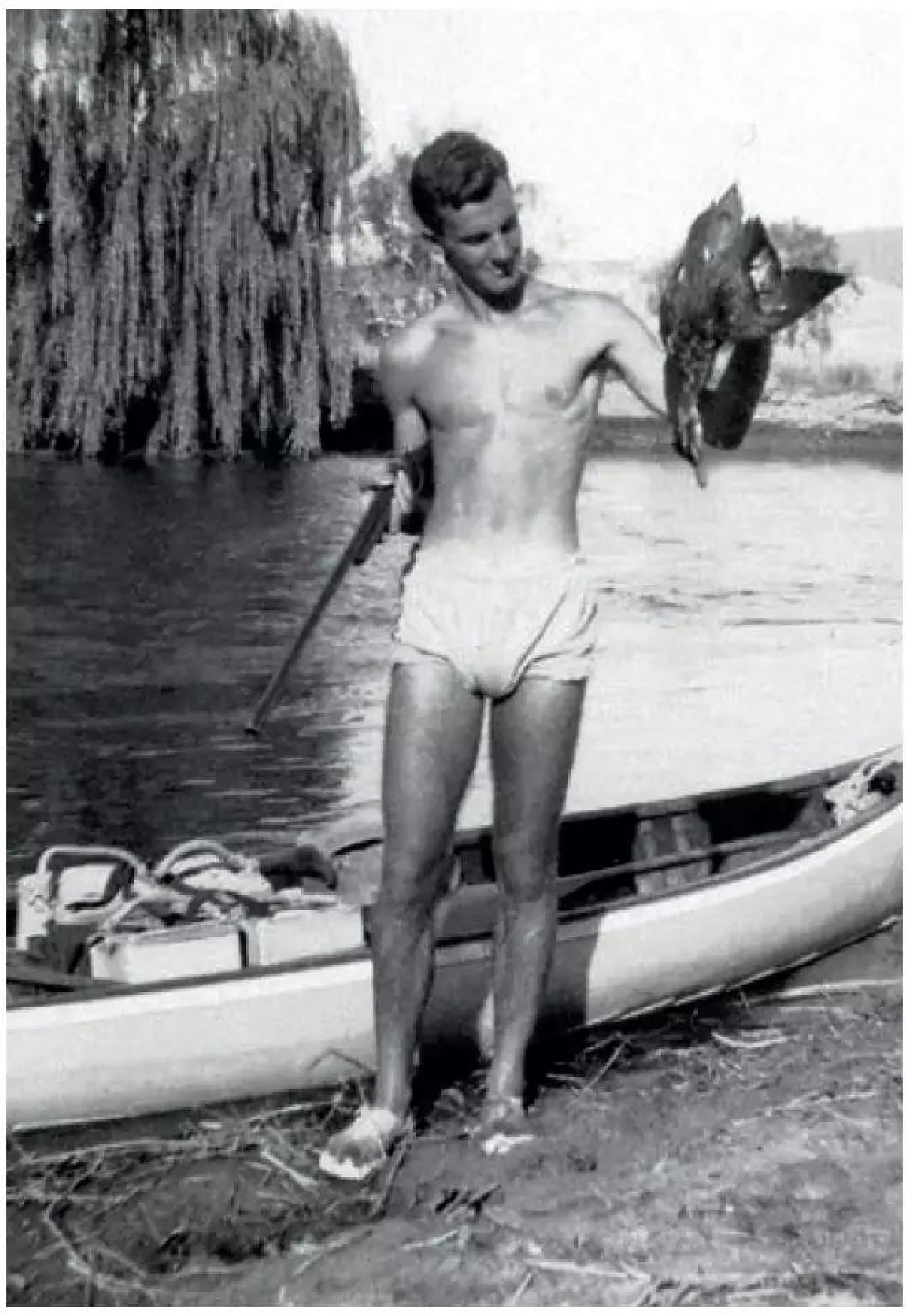
Among the first publications printed by Rotary under licence were the Pacific editions of *Reader's Digest*, *Time* magazine and the first *Phantom* comics. The *ABC Weekly* magazine and the *Australian Army* newspaper were amongst the earliest local titles printed.

To complement the newspaper printing operation a second printing facility was set up at Crane Place, a small laneway between George and Pitt Streets at Circular Quay. That building contained a number of shops and other commercial businesses, and like the Warwick Building the printing operation was in the basement. This included sheet-fed presses, later to be upgraded in 1958 to three Heidelberg Cylinder Letterpress machines, still considered to be the best letterpress press ever made, plus Heidelberg Platen and Vertical Mehile equipment. The compositors department had four linotype (hot metal typesetting) machines. Altogether there were about 30 staff at Crane Place including machinists, compositors and proof readers.

In its 65-year history there were only three managers at Rotary Colorprint. The first, Bob Ritchie, died on the job in 1966. The second, Neville Bunce Snr, held the position until 1982 when his son Neville Bunce Jnr took over.

The young Bunce started at the company as an apprentice in February 1963. "Prior to doing apprenticeships at the printers," he recalls, "all apprentices were required to do three months of office work as delivery messengers at the Yaffa Syndicate offices in the Warwick Building on Hamilton Street. The first three months of my working life were spent delivering parcels, advertising copy, metal printing blocks and newspapers all around the city, plus daily trips to Martin Place to collect the company's mail from GPO Box 606. We walked everywhere, no public transport for us. I was fifteen and a half years old and got to know all the streets and important city landmarks.

"I started my five-year apprenticeship as a letterpress printer at Crane Place in May 1963 but later that year we were told that the Warwick Building was going to be sold. A new building was to be built on the site... Sydney's Australia Square." (In all, a total of 30 buildings would be demolished for this iconic Harry Seidler-designed building that became Sydney's tallest skyscraper at 50 storeys).



David Yaffa Jnr (DY) in New Guinea.

Moving to Surry Hills

The company had been given notice to quit the Warwick Building in May 1962, but finding suitable new premises for the presses proved to be a major problem, causing extensive delays. Finally a building was found in Surry Hills near Central Station at Butt Street. (Butt Street is a dark, narrow lane that was known colloquially as Blood Alley because warring gangs of young men used to dump the bodies of their enemies there).

"The Butt Street building was three storeys, previously a cosmetics factory, large enough for both printing operations including the 55-60 printing staff and all the office staff. The newspaper press and large equipment from the basement in the Warwick Building could be accommodated on the ground floor, while the Crane Place staff and their letterpress machines could be accommodated on the first floor. The office staff were on the top floor. That was the plan," says Bunce. "not everyone was happy... Surry Hills was so far away!

"I was the first employee to walk into Butt Street – being the youngest staff member it was my job the clean up the new building. The Rotary truck driver would drop me at the door in the morning and come back in the afternoon to pick me up. I spent a few days by myself sweeping the dusty floors and doing a general clean-up.

"What I didn't know at the time was that I would be doing the same job 42 years later when the company vacated the building... sweeping the floors and cleaning up everything. I was the last person to leave the building, as well as the first to enter it!" (Young Neville is also the only person alive today to have worked at the Warwick Building, Crane Place and Butt Street).

Rotary Colorprint was a mid-size commercial printing operation from the 1960s through to the 1980s. It employed around 55 staff working 8-hour day and afternoon shifts. Over the years more than 30 apprentices did their five-year trade course there, with three apprentices achieving Apprentice of the Year status. Apprentices and truck drivers were usually sourced by Neville Bunce Snr at his local pub in Leichhardt.

In the early 1950s Rotary printed the comic sections for the weekend newspapers plus stand-alone King Features comics including *Blondie, Dagwood, Archie, Phantom Ranger, Lois, The Shadow, The Invisible Man, Flash Gordon, Beetle Bailey, Mandrake, Jungle Jim, Felix the Cat, Denis the Menace* and so on, and Cleveland Westerns. These were followed in the '60s and later by booklets of crosswords, puzzles and horoscopes and a succession of 'pulp fiction' products – detective stories, action stories, 'true confessions' and a host of titillating and risque titles such as *Daring Men's Stories, Adventure For Men, Modern Men* and *Real Experiences*. Different times – the presses had to be kept busy somehow!

By the turn of the century printing technology was marching on and plate-less printing was the way of the future. On top of this, much of the machinery at Rotary Colorprint was reaching the end of its life. Eventually there was a clear choice – upgrade most of equipment at great cost or get out of the printing business. Pragmatism won the day and the company closed operations in August 2005.

A Diversion to New Guinea

David Yaffa died in 1947 and was survived by his wife Doris, daughter Denise and son David Jnr, who was only 13. Stanley Eskell, husband of Denise Yaffa, became managing director of the company.

Stanley Eskell had been in the army during the war and had served in New Guinea, an experience he would soon put to advantage. In 1950 the company launched *The South Pacific Post*, based in Port Moresby, to be followed later by a group of other local newspapers that included *The New Guinea Courier*, *The Rabaul Times*, *The New Guinea Times* and *Nu Gini Toktok*.

In addition to printing and publishing its newspapers in New Guinea the company was busy distributing the comics that it printed in Australia as well as representing the American publications *Time* and *Life International* in the region. It also distributed *The Bulletin* and *Australian Women's Weekly* magazines and the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers for Consolidated Press. Its letterhead proudly described the company as "Commercial printers and publishers of the first air-delivered newspaper in the Pacific".

David Yaffa Jnr (referred to as DY from here onwards) joined the company at the earliest opportunity aged 22 and became a director in 1959, aged 25. In 1961 Stanley Eskell resigned from the board and DY took over as managing director.

The following year discussions were held about the possible expansion of the company to include more offices and additional commercial printing operations in New Guinea. There was also comment made that the papers needed stronger editorial direction bearing in mind the changing political environment. A number of interested parties expressed their interest in purchasing a stake in the company to address such criticism. This led ultimately to the sale of a controlling interest in the New Guinea operation to the Melbourne-based *Herald & Weekly Times* Group.

Essentially Yaffa Syndicate ended its New Guinea business in 1965.

Building a Stable

For more than 30 years the company owned just one publication, *Newspaper News*. That all changed in the 1960s as David Yaffa Jnr (DY) assembled a stable of business and consumer magazines.

The company's presses were busy enough printing pulp products, but no doubt there was a limit to how many booklets of puzzles, crosswords, detective stories, true confessions and titillating tales the market could stand. Alternatively, magazines could produce a healthy income from advertising and subscriptions, particularly if they could corner a market or dominate a category.

Launching a magazine cold turkey is a lengthy and expensive process. If it fails, the financial loss can be high and irretrievable. DY's preferred method was to buy publications that were struggling or in a fire sale, and breathe life into them. By keeping a heavy lid on costs he could run them more economically than under their previous owners and, as the stable of titles grew, economies of scale could kick in.

In the 1960s he purchased eight magazines and launched none; in the 1970s he purchased eight more magazines and launched one. Right from the start the magazines were a mixture of business titles (trade magazines) and special interest titles (consumer magazines). This mix is unique – no other publishing company in Australia covers both categories, they are either publishers of business magazines or publishers of consumer magazines. This is still the case.

Three of the magazines acquired in the 1960s are still published: the business magazine *Packaging News* and the consumer magazines *Australian Flying* and *Sporting Shooter*. The one magazine launched in the 1970s, *Guns Australia*, survived in a fashion, being merged with *Sporting Shooter*. The other seven are no longer published.

Magazine publishing is an ever-changing business. Successful titles are invested in and improved. Spin-off products such as guides and directories may be created to capitalise on the momentum of the parent title and an effective subscriber list. Unsuccessful titles are quietly buried, but only after every effort has been made to keep them alive. These efforts might include changing the frequency, the paper stock, the page size, the number of pages, the binding, the print run, the distribution or the staffing.

DY was a master at tweaking these variables, but in the end it always came down to the bottom line. No room for sentiment. Of the 56 titles published by the company since 1960 only 16 survive in print. The stable reached its zenith in 2003 with 37 magazines.

Over the years with its business titles the Yaffa Group published the market leader or significant magazine in more than 20 industries including packaging, food manufacturing, advertising, shooting, photography, air conditioning, panelbeating, boating/sailing, fishing, dance, aviation, textiles/fashion, defence, sports goods, stationery, hospital management and club management. With special interest magazines it published leading titles about flying, fishing, cycling, photography, shooting, dance, sailing, walking, health, woodworking, skiing and scuba diving.

The Empire Builder

David Yaffa Jnr (DY)'s career with the company spanned 57 years from 1955 to 2012. As proprietor he built the company into arguably the largest independent specialist publishing group in Australia.

DY's father would not recognise the company as it is today. The syndication business, the backbone of the company before the war, no longer operates. The printing company, the major contributor to the company's coffers in the generation after the war, no longer operates. The world changed, and the company had to change with it.

During his time with the company DY presided over the expansion of its printing operations, initiated its major move into magazine publishing, assembled a stable of more than 30 magazines. He also closed down the printing company – there was no room for sentimentality.

"David Yaffa was a proprietor with a true feel for the media," stated *AdNews* in its obituary in 2018. "He was in it for the long haul. He spent a lifetime building up the business his way, through trial and error, virtually single-handed. His greatest business achievement was the development of his father's business into a significant force in Australian publishing. Few companies in Australia remain in private hands after nearly a century.

"While he was single-minded and demanding, he was not the stereotypical, ruthless media proprietor. He was polite and fair and would treat his staff with respect if they did their jobs well. For those on the editorial side it was gratifying that the content of the magazine came first. In theory a good product attracted readers, and good readership numbers attracted advertisers. More revenue could then be allocated to improving the product further. Consequently he backed his good editors and let them get on with the job without interference."

Tracy Yaffa and David Yaffa.

At work he remained behind the closed door of his office every day from 8.45 to 6, preferring to speak with his lieutenants by phone. There were occasional meetings in his office limited by the number of chairs for visitors (three). In later years budget meetings were held in the boardroom with senior staff of the different magazine groups, but company-wide management meetings never happened.

Most of his employees would only see him fleetingly. He was not the type of boss to wander around the building, let alone have discussions away from his office. The company Christmas party was an exception, when he was happy to chat with his staff. In some years there were rumours that he would make an announcement about the company to his staff, but that never happened either.

He retired in good health in 2012, possibly with some reluctance about handing over the company he had built to the next generation. He enjoyed six years of retirement and after his death in 2018 the company's staff were invited to join the family at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in Kirribilli to celebrate his life.

All four of DY's children have worked in the company at one time or another. Tracy is managing director, Max was a sales manager on business magazines for many years, Guy worked briefly in the marine group of magazines in the 1990s, and James was publisher of *AdNews* before his current role of establishing the bicycling classics events. Tracy's daughter Lucy is the company's marketing and events manager. The company is now owned by Tracy and James.

NEWSPAPER NEWS
A Prosperous New Year To All
NEWSPAPER NEWS
Advertising News
Auntie's big chance!
Advertising News
Patts tops $100 million
Masius, MDA & Burnett move up
"You'll find me in the Sunday Sun."
AdNews
AdNews
90 YEARS
Alexa, tell me about Amazon.

The evolution of *Newspaper News* to *Advertising News* then *AdNews*.

The Flagship

The oldest publication in the Yaffa stable is *AdNews*, the flagship of the company, which will be 100 years old in three years' time. It started life as *Newspaper News* and went through quite a few name changes.

Newspaper News launched as a monthly tabloid size newspaper in 1928, and despite its name was never just about newspapers. Advertising is the lifeblood of media, and David Yaffa recognised this right from the start. There were two publications about advertising already circulating – *Advertising in Australia* and *The Advertiser's Monthly* – that would have been seen as competitors. So he bought them out and merged them into *Newspaper News* within a year.

Newspaper News reported on all forms of media, not just newspapers, although newspapers were the dominant advertising medium until well after the war. Coverage concentrated more on the business side of publishing – advertising, circulation and production technology – and less on the journalism side. Commercial radio and outdoor advertising (posters and billboards) received token coverage in the early days.

Commercial radio gathered pace in the 1950s and television launched in 1956, leading to the launch of a spin-off publication called *Radio Television News* in 1957. At the same time the frequency of *Newspaper News* was increased from monthly to fortnightly and it became a magazine rather than a newspaper. *Radio Television News*, however, faced strong competition, was unable to exist on its own, and was incorporated into *Newspaper News* in 1961.

The impact of television was enormous. The production values of commercials became more and more important, leading to a rapid expansion of the advertising industry with its expertise in the creation of advertisements and media planning and buying. International ad agency networks, mostly from the US, spread across the world. Advertising agencies became indispensable players, in many ways controlling the relationship between their clients (advertisers/marketers) and the media. The appearance of specialised media buying agencies in the 1970s strengthened their position further.

This ascendance of the advertising industry led to the publication being renamed *Advertising & Newspaper News* in 1969, with a further change to *Advertising News* in 1971. This was shortened to *AdNews* in 1984 as part of a redesign.

The 1980s and the rest of the century were hectic times for the media. Until Treasurer Paul Keating stopped it, the fringe benefits tax allowed entertainment as a tax-deductable expense. Enormous amounts of alcohol and food were devoured in the interests of doing business. Long hours at the pub, lunches that never ended and exotic junkets were par for the course. For many organisations, including *AdNews*, the primary aim was to finish the week's work by lunchtime Friday so that you didn't need to go back to the office from the restaurant or pub.

Cycling Classics founder, James Yaffa in lycra.

In 1980 *AdNews* interviewed Don Morris, managing director of the ad agency Mojo, which was winning every pitch it contested at the time. "We work bloody hard here," he said on the record. "We start around 7am so that we can finish the day's work by lunchtime. That way we can enjoy lunch and not go back to the office. We do that every day of the week."

Agency Christmas parties were legendary. Certain agencies became known for their spectacular parties and made enormous efforts to ensure each one was better than the last. Mike Magnus of Magnus Nankervis & Curl owned a rural property southwest of Sydney alongside a disused railway line. Somehow he persuaded NSW Railways to open up the line and provide a train service for his guests to ride from Central Station to the end of his property's driveway where a temporary platform was constructed.

Guests at agency Christmas parties were typically staff, clients and friends in the media. For one Christmas party at MDA Sydney an above ground pool was installed in the agency and before long guests were stripping off and hopping completely naked into the pool… if they could find space… staff and guests, male and female, all piled in.

Things calmed down somewhat after the recession of 1990. Nevertheless, the advertising industry still had plenty of character – it was, after all, supposed to be the leader in creativity – but the boozy culture eased up as agencies gradually became more corporate.

Transition to Media

In 2015 the Yaffa Publishing Group was rebranded as Yaffa Media. The transition from printed magazines to a media and marketing company with multiple touch points was a complicated and at times painful journey.

The arrival of digital technology in the 1990s hit the media industry like a sledgehammer. Disruption was rampant. Print-based companies such as newspaper and magazine publishers were in many ways hamstrung by their past as they tried to hold onto their print revenues. Like most publishing companies Yaffa was a laggard in embracing the new technology, a situation that opened the door temporarily to start-ups and digital natives that had no legacy to protect. Consultants were employed to build systems and websites in the early days, often with very little success. Finally, by the end of the century, the company started to establish workable websites and newsletters and get up to speed with the changing technology.

Managing director Tracy Yaffa looked back at how it was during the transition: "When we first did digital the editor had to be across it, of course, but there was this other department that did all the uploading and other digital things, and there were even dedicated sales people just for digital. People became focused almost on keeping them separate. There was print and there was digital, whereas now it's just what it is, it's just publishing."

The rebranding of the company was announced at a staff function in 2015. "We are no longer magazine publishers," said Tracy. "We are creators of engaging media. Our inspired content is consumed on different platforms. We are experts in our diverse fields and a trusted and valued source in this new world. Our magazines are now brands across print, digital, apps, conferences and social media. We must continue to strive to achieve or maintain market leadership in each of our targeted segments."

Most importantly, the rebranding required a change of approach among the staff – they needed to embrace the future, and were advised that they could either get on board the 'Yaffa bus' or choose another bus. "It was a matter of getting wholesale change from the people," said Tracy. "They had to think differently, think about what the needs of the company were, and what the aims of the publications were. A few jumped off the bus because they simply couldn't adjust to changing needs, but by and large it was really impressive about how excited everyone got about it. It's been amazing seeing what people can turn their attention to once they get it."

One of the company's earlier diversifications was the move into events. Since the 1990s the company had been commissioning Two de Force, an events company, to organise the *AdNews* Agency of the Year Awards, an annual industry awards dinner. The relationship worked, and when Two de Force was offered for sale to Yaffa in 2007 the deal was done. Awards and other events for Yaffa magazines could then be handled in-house by Two de Force. Additionally, Two de Force could expand its operations independently by organising events for non-Yaffa clients. Events provided multiple revenue opportunities – sponsorships, entry fees for awards and competitions, and tickets to attend.

While events can be a key part of the mix, there are many other ways the company has developed to help clients achieve their marketing aims. The list now includes conferences, exhibitions, product launches, competitions, awards, podcasts, videos, roundtables, moderating and hosting. Magazines that can be extended into these areas are the ones that have survived; magazines that have not been able to offer such additional marketing opportunities are unlikely to survive. As Tracy explains: "We used to mark our success by the economies of scale – the more titles the better – although the 80/20 rule applied with 80% of the profit coming from 20% of the titles. But then the internet and social media arrived and we found the long tail of the less profitable titles was dragging us down. So our strategy became one of going deep into the industries we served – in each industry we aim to be number one, be relevant and reimagine what we can produce for them. Now there's a suite of things we can do very easily, whether it's a conference, a breakfast, an awards program, an online entry campaign or a white paper. We can do all these things and offer them up for each industry."

This has required a long list of additional skills from the editorial and production staff. The editors continue to co-ordinate content – just as they did in the old days of printed magazines – but now they need to get out of the office, be comfortable on the stage at conferences and events, create podcasts and videos, and generally be the face of the publication as well as coordinate editorial support. Now they are professional communicators, conference agenda leaders and keynote speakers, and the presence of the editor driving the content package sweetens the deal. 'Church and state', the traditional divide between editorial and advertising, is a thing of the past.

Celebrating 100 years with an eye on the future: James Yaffa, Tracy Yaffa and Lucy Yaffa.

The Next Generation

Lucy Yaffa, marketing and events manager of Yaffa Media and a fourth generation member of the family, takes a look into an unknown future.

It's near impossible to predict what impact changes in technology will have on the business – from AI to The Metaverse – innovation in technology will continue to transform how Yaffa Media's content is created, distributed and consumed.

As we look into the future, one constant at the core of our business is the people and their communities. From photography to packaging we will continue to connect with and serve the needs of each community. The nature of these connections will inevitably change as we explore new platforms and ways to connect.

Working for a medium-sized family business is quite a different experience compared to the global multinational companies I have worked for in the past. While we may not have the same access to resources as larger companies, our agility puts us in a strong position to navigate the future. We can implement changes quickly without the need for lengthy approval processes. In addition, we are open to taking risks and exploring new ideas for connecting with our communities.

I'm incredibly proud being the fourth generation in a business which has successfully adapted and evolved over the past 100 years. I'm excited about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for Yaffa Media. ●

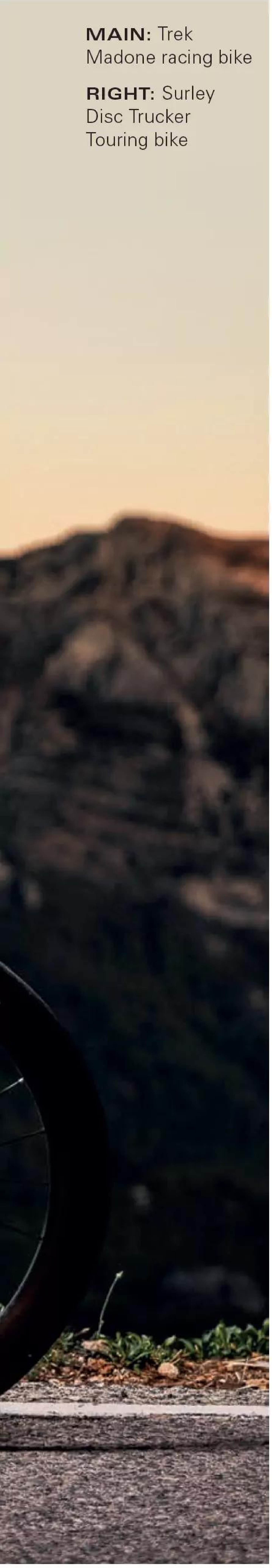
By Jeremy Light
Jeremy worked at *AdNews* from 1978–2015.

Which type of road bike for me?

Longtime BA contributor Michael Hanslip examines the different types of road bikes and explains which one might best suit your needs.

WORDS: MICHAEL HANSLIP

PROJECTONE
TREK
SRAM
P ZERO
BONTRAGER
AEOLUS
PIRELLI



MAIN: Trek Madone racing bike

RIGHT: Surley Disc Trucker Touring bike

If we turn our thoughts back to the 1960s, a road bike was recognisably the same as a current one. They had drop handlebars, 700C wheels, a double diamond frame and so on. Those bikes were made with steel tubes, the brakes and tyres weren't as good, and they were heavy. And arguably, there were only road bikes (everything was pretty similar). Bikes typically had five sprockets on the freewheel.

The 1980s brought indexed gearing, good clincher tyres replaced singles, and better steel tubing and brakes were introduced. This decade also saw the first disc wheels and the creation of funny bikes for the time trial discipline (instead of riding a regular bike)—one of the first times we saw a sub-type of road bike. Bikes had six or seven sprockets on the freewheel.

The 1990s introduced Australians to production time trial and cyclocross bikes (maybe they had CX bikes earlier in Europe?), integrated brake/shift levers, and an almost complete change from steel frames to aluminium ones (with a little titanium thrown in). The carbon that did appear in the '90s was expensive and heavy—nothing like the modern stuff. Bikes had eight or nine sprockets on the (now) cassette.

The new millennium saw the first successful electronic shifting, and there was lots of carbon everywhere (bars, stems, rims, frames, seat posts, etc.). Road bikes that weren't for racing or touring became common. Bikes had 10 or 11 sprocket cassettes. That brings us close enough to today where cassettes now have 12 or 13 sprockets. Let's take a look at the different types of road bikes, what makes them special, what their use case is, and who they are for.

The racing bike

What is it? You can't buy a Formula One car. You can buy a World Rally Car, but the price is crazy. However, you can buy the same racing bike that Grand Tour winners ride (and it will only cost you around twenty thousand dollars). Race bikes are light, responsive, stiff and have amazing handling that permits fast climbing and full-speed descending of mountain passes. Almost the entire bike is made from carbon fibre, making it possible to make a good bike around 5kg, but most of the bikes you find in a bike shop are closer to 7kg. It's still amazingly light. Modern tyres and disc brakes mean not slowing down much in the rain. Current racing bikes are marvels. I own one and feel special every time I jump on it.

Even a racing bike is not specific enough for today's marketplace. Most companies have both a climbing bike and an aero bike in their catalogue. The differences are in the frame, with the aero bike sporting wing-shaped tubes and deep-rim wheels to smooth the airflow.

Who is it for? There are a lot of diminishing returns in the road bike market. A full Pro Tour level bike is around $20K, but you can have 99 per cent of that performance for about half that. And even at a quarter of the price, you get a bike better than anything available ten years ago. A Grand Tour rider always has a climbing and an aero bike at their disposal to suit the day's stage. Consumers usually have to choose, and your pick should reflect your strengths on the bike. With the array of bicycles available today, the only people who should be buying a racing bike are those who do club racing. If you aren't racing, another genre of bike will suit you better.

Examples: Felt offers the FR for the climbers and the AR for the speedsters. After about a decade of producing a climbing bike (the Emonda) and an aero bike (the Madone), Trek changed things up last year by introducing a new Madone that offers Emonda weight and (almost) old-Madone aerodynamics.

The touring bike

What is it? I recall touring bikes being a big deal when I was a teen. Seemed they were in most brand's line ups back then. Today, they are a bit more exotic. A touring bike is a road bike with a longer wheelbase, room for bigger tyres and mounts for front and rear racks to carry all the gear while you go on a self-supported journey. I believe the advent of "bike packing", where all the gear is carried in bags in the centre of the frame and behind the seat, is partly to blame for touring bikes being a less-available option. The rest of the blame probably goes to gravel bikes, which are almost touring bikes with even larger tyres (see gravel bikes below).

Who is it for? Anyone who wants to trek a long way self-supported and carry their gear on the bike in panniers.

Example: The Surly Disc Trucker is a classic touring bike. Some other brands have what they call a touring bike, but it isn't what I think of. Either they have flat bars or they are really gravel/adventure bikes labelled as touring bikes.

"YOU CAN BUY THE SAME RACING BIKE THAT GRAND TOUR WINNERS RIDE"

BELOW: Cervelo Calendonia 5 endurance bike

The time trial bike

What is it? The most focused of racing bikes. All else is sacrificed to aerodynamics of rider and bike in the pursuit of speed. Most big brands offer (only) one TT bike model, which is related to their larger selection of triathlon bikes, but the rules governing the two sports are quite different, so one frame will not be optimal for both.

Who is it for? Anyone who does time trials. Either stand-alone events or as part of stage races. You can do a time trial on your regular bike, but you will lose time to someone of equal ability who brought a time trial bike.

Example: The Giant Trinity offers one high-end time trial bike as well as a similar (but not identical) triathlon bike, also called Trinity.

The endurance bike

What is it? An endurance bike is a racing bike with slightly soft "edges" and more comfortable geometry. A little flex in the seat stays takes the edge off bumps. A taller headtube makes the position more comfortable for long hours and/or older riders. A slightly slacker head angle and longer wheelbase mute the handling. It's a perfect place to spend several hours at a stretch comfortably.

Who is it for? The appearance of the endurance bike roughly corresponds with the emergence of the Grand Fondo as a big thing. A few of these events have been around for decades, but many – like the ones run by *Bicycling Australia* – are relatively recent additions to the annual calendar. The Grand Fondo hosts hundreds or thousands of keen cyclists, many of whom are not racers; the endurance bike is a good compromise of fast and comfortable for these riders. And that is the ideal candidate for an endurance bike: someone who wants to ride long and fast, but isn't racing and doesn't require the last percentage of speed a good racing bike can provide.

Example: For me, the two ultimate endurance bikes are the Trek Domane and the Specialized Roubaix. Thanks to multiple generations of development, both bikes have designs that optimise comfort while retaining enough speed. The Cervelo Caledonia-5 is an endurance bike built to handle long-distance and high-speed racing.

TOP: Orbea Terra gravel bike

ABOVE: Giant Trinity TT bike ridden by Luke Plapp

The gravel bike

What is it? In many ways, the gravel bike is a 1980s-era MTB with drop handlebars. The evolution of gravel mimics the early development of MTB way back when, too. Like the racing bike, two clear sub-genres are emerging in the gravel space. Dedicated race bikes that aren't meant to work as a bikepacking or all-road bike, and more adventurous gravel bikes replete with multiple mounting points for bikepacking bags, racks, mudguards and sometimes five or six bidon cages. Suspension is even creeping into some of the race bikes, but I don't think that's the future for gravel because MTB exists. Most gravel bikes use a standard 700C rim size, but rim widths are more like those found on MTB and tyre sizes are most often around 45mm wide (not quite MTB, definitely not road). Also, like early MTB, there is no actual agreement across brands as to the optimal geometry, and even subsequent generations from one brand move around a lot in the geometry.

Who is it for? A gravel bike with road tyres is an endurance bike. A gravel bike with full knobby tyres is a rigid MTB with drop bars. These are the Swiss Army Knife of bikes. They are for anyone who wants a bike that can do lots of things. Light touring – check. Bikepacking – check. Wednesday night criterium in C grade – check. Gravel Fondo has over 150km of dirt roads – check. Gravel race – check. Commuting – check.

Gravel is huge right now because so many cyclists are trying to get off the main roads, away from cars. And even on those roads, potholes make standard road tyres a bit precarious. In Australia, gravel bikes tend to be second or third bikes for many – but in my recent bunch riding skills classes, I had several gravel bike-owning novices for whom it was their only bicycle.

Example: Orbea's Terra gravel bike is available in several options, including alloy and carbon frames. At the adventure end of the gravel spectrum, it has numerous mounts on the frame and fork.

Summing up

At its most basic, a road bike is any bike with drop handlebars. But it is never so simple as that. Time trial bikes do not have drop bars but are the most road-specific bike of the lot. I once worked in a bike shop where we purchased older road bikes and sold them as commuter bikes after swapping out the drop bars for flat bars – yet they were still very much road bikes. And what about a gravel bike with 2" MTB tyres on it compared to a hardtail MTB with the same 2" tyres? If I could have only one road bike, I think it would have to be the Formula One option – a pure race bike. I like racing and love the unmitigated speed of a modern racing bike. But that's just me. And in writing that sentence, I realised that would cut me off from riding on any gravel. Your choice should reflect your riding habits and intentions. Hopefully, this little guide will help you sort out which type of bike best suits your needs. BA

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BBB Chester full-frame sunglasses

Orbea Terra x 2

Our editor and her partner recently rode the gravel roads of Mudgee, including the Dirty Mudgee course on Orbea Terras.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

Riding the Dirty Mudgee course

We recently put the Orbea Terra gravel bikes through their paces on the gravel roads of Mudgee and found them comfortable, stable and responsive on both smooth and rocky gravel.

I rode the Terra M20iTeam while my partner tested the Terra M30Team. Neither of us had ridden much on gravel before, save for the occasional gravel driveway on our road bikes, but after a few days, we were hooked.

One of the things that struck us about gravel riding is the quietness of the country roads. Very little traffic passed us in either direction over the four days as we explored the back roads of Mudgee (see destination article). We are both used to riding in Sydney's busy inner west, so it was a nice break from the hustle and bustle, which we swapped for views of sweeping vistas, farm animals, vineyards, and a huge mob of kangaroos.

There is something very comforting about looking down on a chunky tyre with lots of grippy material when you're about to launch yourself onto a gravel road. The tyres I was gazing at were a generous 38mm wide, a full 10mm wider than my road bike tyres, and they make a huge difference for a comfortable and safe ride on unsealed roads. Both the Terra models we rode can be fitted with up to 45mm tyres or 650b x 50 treads (mountain bike tyres) for extra durability and comfort if you need more traction.

Of course, there's way more to a gravel bike than fat tyres, like frame geometry, build quality, dedicated gearing, suitable handlebars, comfortable saddle and more. Read on...

First impressions

Straight up, we enjoyed the gravel bikes' more relaxed geometry compared to our more race-style road bikes, even on the bitumen. Plus, the wider tyres that absorb vibrations and help maintain control on loose surfaces were a game changer on the dirt roads. After a few days on the Terra, I found myself riding up and down gutters, something I rarely do on my road bike.

Neither of us had ever ridden an Orbea bike before, and the first thing we noticed was the build quality of the bikes, which had flawless paint jobs and aesthetically pleasing styling. Overall, both bikes were great to ride and looked good, too.

I rode the Orbea Terra M20iTM in cosmic carbon view/metallic olive green colourway with Shimano GRX RX825 Di2, 2 x 12 transmission and OQUO RC 25Team Wheels.

My partner Phil rode the Orbea Terra M30TM in the ivory white/spicy lime colourway with Shimano GRX RX610 2 x 12.

Frame and geometry

Gravel bikes are designed to be comfortable on rough terrain, absorb

"THE FIRST THING WE NOTICED WAS THE BUILD QUALITY OF THE BIKES."

vibrations and maintain control on loose surfaces, and the Orbea Terras delivered on this promise.

We both found the Terra's geometry comfortable to ride. The longer wheelbase and chain stay, along with a lower bottom bracket, ensured stability on various terrain. This, coupled with the longer top tube and shorter stem, made steering precise and comfortable. Not once did I feel like I was going to fall off!

Orbea says using a shorter seat tube with a more relaxed angle allows the seat post to flex more. Plus, Orbea has removed material from the seat tube near the bottom bracket to tune the rigidity. Both these designs aim to optimise vibration absorption and vertical compliance.

One nifty feature of both bikes is the storage area inside the downtube, hidden behind the bottle cage. There is space for the tube, pump, or CO2 cartridge and a selection of tools. I found it a bit clunky to get the items in and out, but I'm sure it would be easier with practice. As a road cyclist, I'm also used to keeping my spares in a small bag under my seat, so I would usually revert to this system. However, the downtube compartment is a great solution when space is minimal, and the environment is dusty and sometimes muddy.

All Terra models also have mounting points for fenders and three water bottles.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, and yes, it does matter what your bike looks like! ... we both preferred the colourway of the bike I was riding.

TOP: Orbea Terra M30Team.

ABOVE: Orbea Terra M20iTeam.

Specifications

Orbea Terra M20iTeam

Frame: Orbea Terra carbon OMR Disc with LOCKR service box

Fork: Orbea Terra ICR, full carbon

Crankset: Shimano GRX RX820 31x48t

Shifters: Shimano GRX Di2 RX825

Cassette: Shimano Ultegra R8100 11-34t 12-Speed

Front & Rear derailleur: Shimano GRX Di2 RX825

Brakes: Shimano RX820 Hydraulic Disc

Handlebar: Easton EC90 AX Carbon

Wheels: Oquo Road Control RC25TEAM

Tyres: Vittoria Terreno Dry CX-Gravel G2.0 TNT 700x38c

Seatpost: OC Performance XP10 Carbon

Saddle: Prologo Akero AGX black rails size 155mm

RRP: $9,999

> **"WITH ORBEA YOU CAN SWAP COMPONENTS WHEN YOU PLACE YOUR ORDER."**

It's officially called 'cosmic carbon view/metallic olive green' but is essentially black with matte and gloss sections and dark gold upper forks and highlights. It also has copper-coloured sparkles on the top tube! After a few days of riding, it had a nice coating of dust but still looked good. This is an off-the-shelf colourway offered by Orbea, but you can choose a wide range of custom colours at no additional cost, an included option on all Orbea road bikes.

Wheels & components

Since the advent of gravel bike riding and the plethora of models released by all the major bike manufacturers, the component manufacturers have also joined in with specific gravel bike groupsets designed for riding off-road.

These groupsets have gearing that provides lower ratios than road bike groupos, to enable easier progress over steep, loose and muddy terrain on a bike that may be loaded up for self-sufficiency.

The Shimano GRX Di2 RX825 groupset on my bike was flawless off-road. Shimano launched this new groupset last year, specifically for gravel bikes with its generous gearing for climbing and cruising. It included a 48/31 crankset and 11-34T cassette on the rear, making climbing comfortable and ensuring I didn't run out of gears on the road on my way into town.

The GRX610, on the other hand, offers more affordable 12-speed components than the GRX820 series. However, it is not a complete groupset because it lacks derailleurs and only comprises shift levers and cranksets. Instead, the bike was fitted with Shimano GRX RX820 front and rear derailleurs.

Both bikes were fitted with Shimano hydraulic disc brakes to match the groupset level. My road bike has hydraulic disc brakes, so I felt reassured by the firm and reliable feeling I got when braking. Phil rides a rim brake road bike, so he enjoyed his introduction to disc brakes.

The Oquo RC25TEAM carbon wheels made by Orbea, specifically for gravel and endurance, also performed well and looked good, too. Phil's bike had alloy wheels that also performed well.

Both bikes were fitted with a gravel-specific cockpit, which proved comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. For gravel riding, Orbea has elevated the tops and drops of the traditional road bar so your neck and shoulders can relax more, focusing on the road ahead. Flared drop bars give more control when descending and more leverage for climbing.

My bike was fitted with a Prologo Akero 155mm wide saddle, which felt comfortable and quite similar to my road bike saddle, which is the same width.

One of the things I like about Orbea is the ability to swap components when you place your order for a new bike. Some component swaps are the same price, but there are also a plethora of upgrade options for handlebars, wheels, saddles, tyres, stems, seat posts, and axles.

Summing up

The Orbea Terra bike is a comfortable, versatile adventure road bike that looks good too. Perhaps its only shortcoming is that it feels slower on the bitumen, but as it's designed for gravel, I shouldn't mark it down for that. I'd certainly put it high on my shortlist if I were in the market for a gravel bike. BA

ABOVE: The Shimano GRX Di2 RX825 gravel gearing provides smooth shifting.

RIGHT: The Terra's gravel-specific cockpit is comfortable and aesthetically pleasing.

OPPOSITE: The Orbea Terra M20iTeam frame geometry is relaxed and comfortable.

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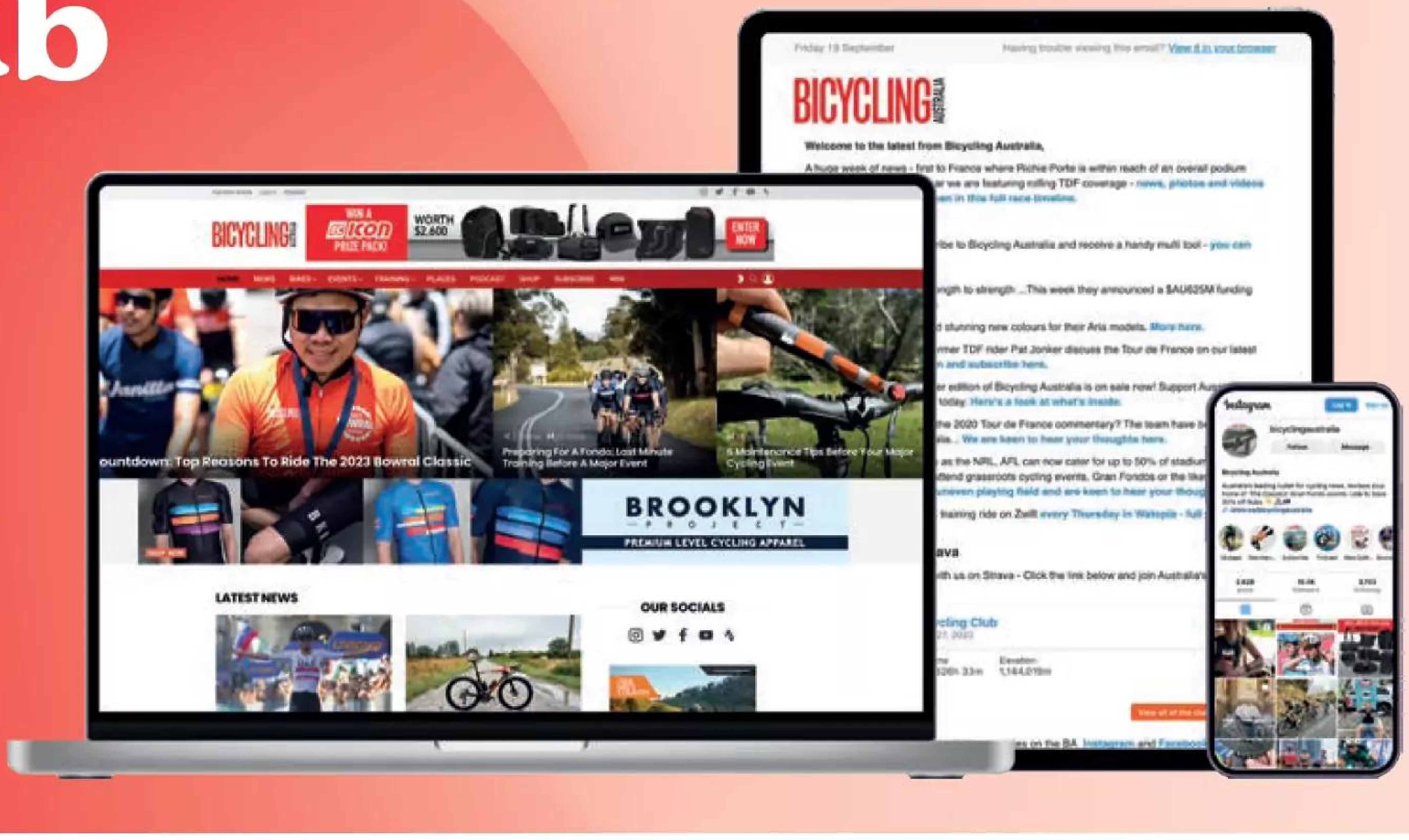

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ENEWSLETTER

Bossi Strada Titanium Road Bike

The 2024/5 summer of cycling was made much sweeter for contributor Harry Kooros thanks to Bossi Bicycles, who loaned its new Strada titanium road bike to test, much of which was done on the Bowral Classic roads.

WORDS: HARRY KOOROS

Founded in 2017 by James Bossi, Bossi Bicycles has become well-known in Australia for its expertly crafted titanium masterpieces. With a deep passion for cycling and a keen eye for design, James drew upon his extensive background in product development, design and materials to establish the brand. His vision is to create bikes that blend engineering excellence with real-world practicality, allowing his bikes to be priced within reach of most keen cyclists while maintaining the highest quality possible.

When asked what significant hurdles he faced when building the Bossi brand in an exceedingly competitive market, James noted that his biggest challenge was creating his own “brand identity”. What helped this was carving out a “niche by focusing on what makes Bossi unique: our commitment to innovative design, a deep understanding of riders’ needs, and delivering bespoke solutions to suit”.

P ZERO
P ZERO
BOSSI
PIRELLI
PIRELLI

ABOVE: The minimalist look and feel of the carbon cockpit will appeal to many.

OPPOSITE: The Bossi Strada Titanium road bike.

Another hurdle he faced was balancing quality with scale, as they were "determined to create bikes that were not only visually stunning but also engineered to perform flawlessly. We were, and still are, obsessed with quality" resonated with me, as it's easy to tell just by taking one look at this bike.

Quality

Designed in Australia by James, all Bossi frames are handcrafted in China before being shipped to Australia, where James handles final assembly and finishing. First, hearing the word 'China' often makes people think 'mass produced' and 'same quality as every other frame', but James works with world-leading manufacturers and has a comprehensive quality control process from start to finish. When the frames arrive in Australia, James reams, taps, and faces every contact point to ensure they are of the highest standard. This process allows him to keep his bikes within price points accessible to the broader cycling market.

First impressions

Picking this bike up from Bossi's store in Sydney, I was taken aback by its beauty. While I've ridden a few titanium bikes in the past, none of them appealed to me like this did. The polished titanium was immaculate, and the branding was unintrusive. Taking it out of the shop, my first worry was safely putting it in my car – a car worth less than half of this bike.

I'm usually not a fan of the mismatched forks that naturally come on titanium bikes, and while I still would have preferred a matched frameset, the matte black carbon fork looked great against the brushed titanium.

The build

The Strada sits right in the middle of Bossi's 2025 road bike range, with the Strada Classic slightly cheaper and the Strada SS somewhat more expensive. The reviewed Strada came with the latest SRAM AXS E1 12-speed wireless groupset. The rest of the build was complemented with Bossi components, including a 40mm carbon wheelset with Bossi's CLD hubs, a 27.2mm titanium seatpost, titanium bottle cages, and a fully integrated cockpit. This extensive scope of branded Bossi components is a unique feature and adds to the build.

One downside of the Strada is that it is only compatible with electronic groupsets. While most new builds at this level will likely be with electronic groupsets, this does limit riders who still want mechanical options. The Strada Classic and Strada SS both allow for electronic or mechanical groupsets, though, so it's not the end of the world for mechanical fans who want to ride a Bossi.

Weight

The frame weighs 1540g (54cm), which is on the heavier side. However, Bossi prioritises comfort and durability, so the weight is a small trade-off. The fork

Specifications

RRP (as reviewed): AUD$14,450

Colour: Raw titanium: brushed

Frame: Bossi Strada Titanium Frame

Fork: Bossi Carbon Integrated Road Disc Fork

Cockpit: Bossi Integrated Carbon Cockpit (100mm x 420mm)

Handlebar Tape: Bossi Stealth 3mm

Headset: FSA Orbit Integrated/44mm headset

Saddle: Selle Repente Latus M Carbon Saddle

Seatpost: Bossi 27.2mm carbon Seatpost

Groupset: SRAM RED AXS E1 12-speed groupset, 48/35t x170mm crankset, 160mm rotors, 10-33t cassette

Bottom Bracket: SRAM DUB T47

Bottle Cages: Bossi Titanium Bottle Cages

Wheels: Bossi RD Carbon Wheelset (1,439g), 40mm deep, tubeless ready clincher

Hubs: Bossi CLD Hubset 24H Straight Pull

Tyres: Pirelli PZero Race TLR 30c

Max Rider Weight: 120kg

Website: www.bossibicycles.com

BELOW: The Strada included the latest SRAM AXS E1 12-speed wireless groupset.

RIGHT: SRAM Disc brakes complemented the build.

weighs 400g, which is on par with most high-quality carbon forks on the market.

The bike, as reviewed, weighs (7.65kg) (excluding pedals but including bottle cages). While this weight is certainly heavier than many carbon bike options out there, people buying titanium know that weight is a slight compromise for its many benefits.

Geometry

The Bossi Strada comes in 52cm, 54cm (ridden), 56cm, 58cm, and 60cm frame sizes. The reviewed 54cm frame features a 72.5º head angle, a 73.5º seat angle, 410mm chainstays, a 72mm bottom bracket drop, and a 153mm headtube. With longer legs and a short torso, my saddle-to-bar drop was fairly significant, and some spacers were needed to get the fit right.

As with most fully integrated cockpits, you need to dial in your fit before the build is completed, as post-build adjustments to the cockpit are costly. James is acutely aware of this and offers custom bike fitting for local customers, and can work with interstate or international bike fitters if you're not local.

How it rides

With a history of bad back issues, I was excited to see how this titanium bike performed comfort-wise compared to carbon. On the first few rides, I noticed how comfortable the bike was, handling the rough Southern Highlands roads with ease and minimising vibrations when going over potholes and gravel sections. It wasn't until returning to my carbon road bike that I realised how different the Bossi was to ride. The main factor that stuck out was how quickly I fatigued on the rough roads in my hands, arms, and back. The Bossi was much more comfortable over longer rides, and I would finish rides with no aches or pains when using it. Another thing I noticed was how stable the bike was, both in straight lines and tipping into sharp corners.

Given titanium's natural flexibility and compliance, previous bikes I've ridden have felt a bit slower and more flexible out of the saddle compared to carbon bikes with similar builds. James seems to have aced the Bossi frames, though, as this bike felt like a weapon on the hills, and the power transfer felt as good as any carbon bike I've ridden, even out of the saddle. BA

Summing up

QUALITY

It's clear from the design and quality of the frames that Bossi Bicycles aren't just white-labeled frames from a factory deep in China. James works hard to ensure that these frames are unique, safe, and of exceptionally high quality, working closely along all supply chain steps to make his frames as good as possible. One look at the complete bike and you can see that it's a well-crafted masterpiece. Riding it was enjoyable and comfortable, and there was never a shortage of riders saying "nice bike" at the local cafe.

PRICE

Bossi Bicycles are essentially the best in the business if you're a titanium lover and have money to spend on your passion. Dealing with such a passionate owner, James, is very comforting when making such a big, considered purchase. This level of intimacy is a big rarity when buying a bike. The reviewed build retails for $14,450, a hefty price tag for most. That said, it is decked out with the best components on the market, and most other brands' top-level builds will cost you the same, if not more.

VALUE FOR MONEY

With complete bikes ranging from just over $6,000 to around $17,000, Bossi offers price points to suit most serious riders. While the Strada I've been riding is certainly out of my price range, I can see the value presented. Given the amount of time and effort James puts into ensuring his bikes are of the highest quality, I would not look past Bossi Bicycles if you're looking for a custom titanium build.

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Zwift Ride: A complete indoor trainer package

Indoor cycling app Zwift has upped the ante with its first foray into indoor bikes. Contributor Luke Meers ran it through its paces.

WORDS: LUKE MEERS

The older I get, the more likely I seem to change my planned outdoor ride for an indoor session. Some may call it being soft, but I'm opting for wise. It doesn't take much rain, wind, or cold temperatures to keep me inside. My growing proclivity for indoor sessions has been aided by the rise and improvement of platforms like Zwift, with its engaging, immersive gamification of the cycling experience, or TrainerRoad, with its AI-generated adaptive training plans, which largely revolve around indoor interval sessions. This is also coupled with the sheer time efficiency of indoor training, the old adage being that an hour on the ergo is worth two outside.

All this is to say that my Wahoo Kickr has had a very good workout over the years and that I've discovered the destructive acceleration of the corrosion process that happens when our bodies drip that lovely electrolytic solution known as sweat all over an indoor bike. I've caused cable failure, thread seizure, and jammed bearings. Being too lazy to remove the bike from the trainer and wash it down after every session, my solution has been to run a sacrificial bike on the trainer. However, the poor old aluminium Cannondale is

nearly completely seized now. So, it is with great interest that I have been able to review an alternative solution to my dilemma, the Zwift Ride.

The Zwift Ride is quite a clever integration of several components to deliver a complete trainer package designed to optimise the use of the Zwift platform. The main parts are a Kickr Core trainer, the Zwift Cog and the newest part, the bike itself. The bike is a heavily built frame approximating a road frame with drop handlebars. It includes multiple adjustment points for saddle height, handlebar height, reach and more. These adjustments feel more like a bike in the gym with marks for position and easy sliding sections. Seemingly odd at first is the single leg at the front, where a fork and front wheel would usually be. At first glance, it looks narrow and unstable, but the sheer rigidity of the frame means that the stability from the trainer at the rear is more than sufficient to support the whole unit. A critical point of the package are the buttons on the handlebars, which allow direct control of the Zwift online environment while riding rather than reaching for your computer keys or phone. It also allows for shifting and steering within Zwift. More on these shortly.

Setup

The day my Zwift Ride arrived, I was shocked to see the sheer number of boxes. The poor delivery driver would have had nothing else in the van. By extension, much of the setup process is just unboxing and removing all the components. Multiple instruction booklets are pleasingly graphically designed in the Zwift kind of style. Assembly was relatively straightforward when following the step-by-step guides. The only tool required was a supplied Allen key (also with a matching Zwift-orange handle). This tool is all you need to adjust any of the position/fit elements of the bike and handily magnetically clips in under the top tube. The frame adjustment allows for riders of around 150cm to around 200cm in height.

When manoeuvring all the bits into place, the heavy, robust, and oversized design of the steel frame is very evident. The bike weighs 17kg in total (without the trainer). However, this is a positive rather than a negative, as the frame feels abundantly strong and reassuring. The Kickr Core paired easily with my PC, and a simple press of the "Z" button on the bars switches on the controls, which then pair directly with the computer.

The Kickr Core is fitted with the Zwift Cog, which means the whole bike is mechanically a single-speed, and all shifting is done virtually. From my perspective, this simplification is a huge positive, especially regarding reducing the number of drivetrain components that can corrode easily. Without a rear derailleur to hold chain tension, a separate tensioner is needed. This sits in front of the rear axle and is released to install or remove the frame from the trainer. This Zwift frame can be purchased separately and will fit with most trainers, but it will only work if the trainer is compatible with single-speed use online.

In addition to the control buttons, the front end has a storage area extending forward from the bars' centre. I guess this is designed for your phone, snacks, etc., and can also be extended with an optional tablet mount.

In use

Once set up, adjustment, and pairing are done, it is time to ride. When you first hop on the bike, the weight and sturdiness of the frame are immediately evident. It feels reassuring and quite pleasant to be on. When riding under load, it can be almost too rigid. When many products on the market allow roll and "natural movement" of trainer bikes, it is perhaps a slight miss that the Zwift bike doesn't allow for anything other than the little bit of slack inherent in the Wahoo Kickr Core. In most situations, this doesn't bother me. Still, when sprinting on the trainer, particularly at the end of a Zwift race, a little more movement would be beneficial to allow the rider's body to be in a more natural flow.

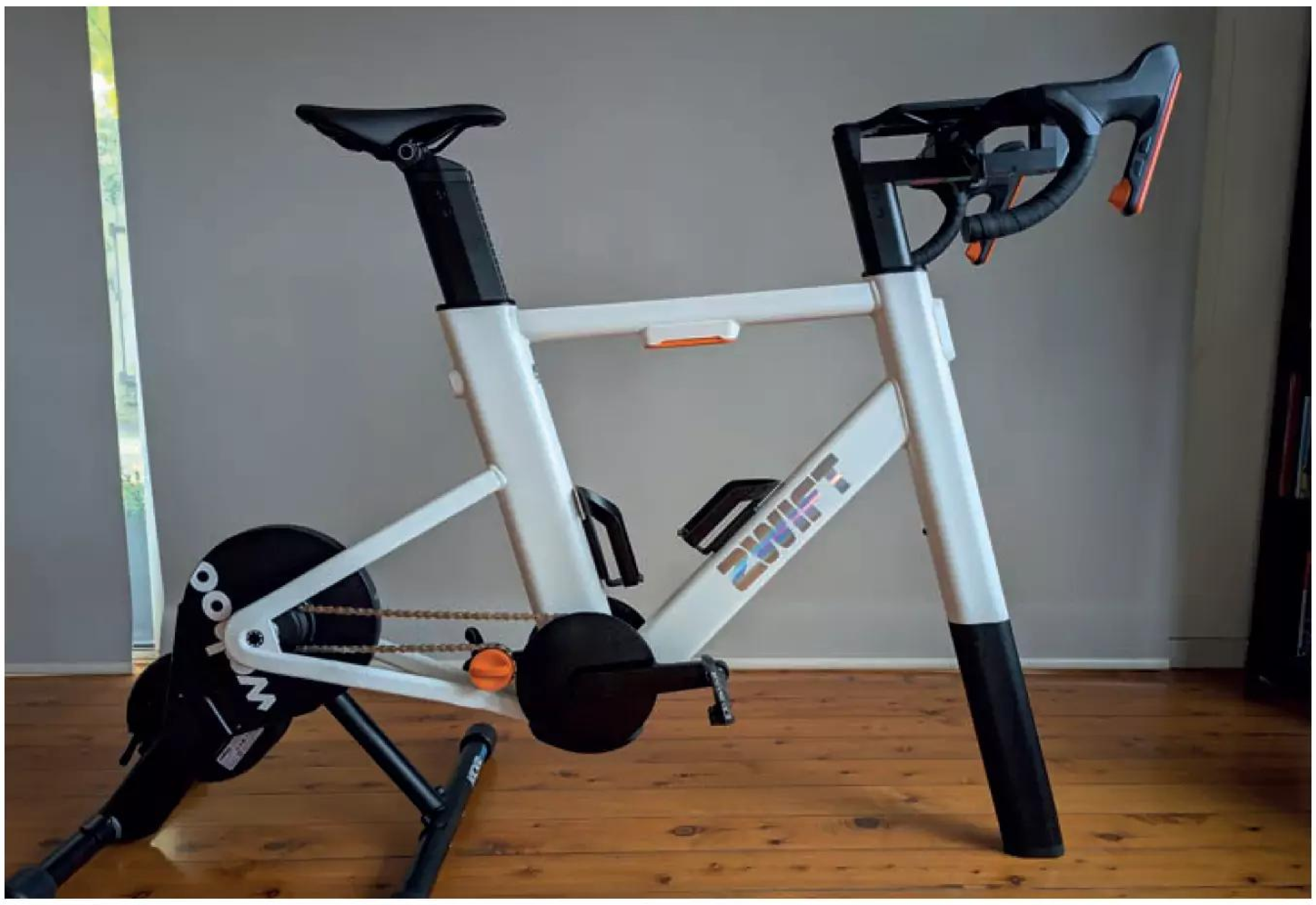
The noise level is pretty good, similar to any current Wahoo trainer, and probably even quieter, given the lack of a rear derailleur. Speaking of which, the chain noise could be almost eliminated if the Zwift bike utilised a belt drive rather than a chain. The main reason not to use a belt is shifting, which is unnecessary here, so it seems like an easy win to convert this system to a belt, thus reducing the need for lubrication and chain maintenance. This may be an improvement for Zwift/Wahoo in the future.

The main point of difference experientially between the Zwift bike and simply riding my standard trainer setup are the front-end controls. The main control buttons are integrated neatly into the tops of the bars within easy reach of thumbs when riding in the hoods. The right handset of buttons function like a video game controller with a select button, a back button, and buttons that largely function to give "Ride-ons" to other Zwifters and to use the various Zwift powerups. The buttons on the left-hand side of the tops are directional for navigating menus. The shifter paddles are placed on the "brake levers", mimicking normal shifting and can be programmed to shift like Shimano or SRAM. At the front of the levers are the steering paddles, allowing in-game movement, although I didn't find many occasions to use these. Overall, the control platform seems quite well thought out, and the buttons are fairly robust and have enough feedback to know when you've pushed them. This integration elevates the virtual world experience and is the single biggest reason someone might want to upgrade to the Zwift Ride. These controllers have integrated, rechargeable batteries that purportedly last 20 hours. I didn't need to plug in at all during the nearly 20 hours I used the bike.

"THE DAYS OF THE 'DREADED INDOOR SESSION' MAY BE GONE FOREVER."

Connectivity with the Zwift application is always relatively quick and seamless. A downside is that the controller buttons (at this point) don't seem to be able to control third-party applications such as TrainerRoad or MyWhoosh. The Kickr Core still pairs straightforwardly with other apps, and the lack of gears is irrelevant when using erg mode. However, if you wanted to use this bike in "free ride" mode with other applications, that could be an issue. That said, the people likely to want this product will probably be Zwift fans and may not need to diversify much.

The current price in Australia is $2299.95 plus shipping – not cheap, but essentially $1400 on top of the trainer's price. However, for regular Zwifters who don't want to compromise their regular road bike or get a sacrificial trainer bike, the Zwift ride provides a valid and enticing option. It is much cheaper than many of the "full bike" trainer options on the market to date.



Summing up

Overall, the Zwift Ride is a well-thought-out and implemented platform that will make keen Zwifters worldwide happy. The clever integration with the Kickr Core keeps costs lower than they otherwise might be. Integrating the Wahoo trainer and cog with the Zwift Ride frame is pleasingly well-designed, and almost every aspect of the indoor training experience is considered. This product adds another level of enjoyment and engagement to the indoor training experience. The days of the 'dreaded indoor session' may be gone forever. BA

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Cycliq's Fly6 Pro and Fly12 Sport are the all-in-one safety system for peace of mind.

Italian Super Group

Arriving with considerable fanfare back in 2023 and more recently heralding Campag's return to the WorldTour in 2025, the Super Record Wireless groupset is sublime.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

Super Record Wireless is Campagnolo's flagship road groupset. Whilst sharing a few cosmetic similarities with its predecessor, Super Record EPS – the raw carbon finishing on the crankset and derailleurs, for example – and clearly honed with data gleaned from the EPS experience, Super Record Wireless is a very different animal. The most fundamental change, of course, is that it's a fully wireless system with bespoke batteries powering each of the derailleurs, something that brings the Italians in line with SRAM AXS and places them ahead of Shimano Di2 which remains semi-wireless, at least for now. Also gone are Campy's trademark thumb shifters, replaced by up/down paddles behind the brake lever in a move sure to delight some and dismay others. Weight-wise, Super Record Wireless sits at a very tidy 2,520 grams (45/29T), placing it generally on par with its main rivals, while also being around 150 grams lighter than Super Record S.

Shifting gears

Campagnolo's ErgoPower shifters have been around for years, and the platform continues to be very, very good. The switch to wireless has obviously necessitated some changes, not least the CR2032 battery under each hood cover. The inclusion of shifting paddles has also provided the opportunity to rethink its levers, with the redesigned shape helping to deliver a firm and comfortable grip in high and low hand positions whilst also providing a more efficient overall braking experience. As was the case with EPS, the brake lever position can also be easily adjusted to provide the perfect reach, regardless of handlebar or hand size. With thumb shifters gone, the inside of the hood now features a battery status LED indicator and a small function button. To maximise battery life, the shifters go into low power mode after 30 minutes of inactivity, whilst any movement wakes them up.

Like several other features, the right and left paddle functions can be customised using the MyCampy app. But regardless of how you set things up, if you're switching from an older Campagnolo gruppo it may take a few rides to get the hang of the new shifting configuration. When you do, you're in for a real treat because moving through the gears, even big jumps across multiple sprockets is smooth and assured with whatever cadence and gearing ratios you throw at them. Powered by tiny precision motors and position sensors, the derailleurs constantly monitor your gearing, shifting automatically into the ideal position for your selected combination, essentially eliminating the risk of chain rub. Pleasingly, despite all the changes, Super Record Wireless maintains a somewhat 'mechanical' feel and sound with just enough feedback.

Hello Bluetooth

With no more wires, the derailleurs communicate directly to the shifters via Bluetooth. Accordingly, each derailleur has its own removable battery; however, the front and rear batteries aren't uniform, so you can't swap them over. Range-wise, Campagnolo claims a reasonably modest 750km per charge. On the flip side, charging is fast, just 60 minutes, using quick-snap magnetic cables.

Crank it up

As was the case with its EPS predecessor, the crankset presents with a distinctive raw carbon finish. Moulded from unidirectional carbon fibre, the four-arm carbon spider and left-side crank arm are connected by a titanium axle featuring Campagnolo's patented Ultra-Torque locking system with aluminium chainrings and ultra-smooth USB ceramic bearings. Hollow construction further reduces the already low weight – the complete standard crankset weighs just 585 grams (down from 618 grams for EPS).

The chainrings have been downsized with 50/34T, 48/32T and 45/29T pairings. Campagnolo has also kept its 12-speed cassettes quite narrow with 10-25T, 10-27T and 10-29T options, indicating a clear focus on optimising cadence rather than maximising gearing range. That said, the 10T sprocket should still allow ample gearing for most. Also worth noting is the use of single-tooth jumps all the way to the seventh gear, aiding silky smooth transitions and more consistent cadence.

Stopping power

As undoubtedly good as the shifting is, braking performance is arguably the single biggest stand out for me. From navigating fast and technical descents to high-speed corners in crowded pacelines, the confidence-inspiring balance of comfort, modulation and precision control is super impressive – quite possibly the best and smoothest braking I've ever experienced. One of the interesting tech features is the use of small aluminium backing plates nestled between the pistons and the pads inside the callipers to help cushion vibration during braking. 160mm and 140mm rotors are available. As you've probably already guessed, there's no rim brake option.

Summing up

Groupset, or status symbol? Campagnolo Super Record Wireless is outstanding. But it's also eye-wateringly expensive, with a price tag significantly higher than both of its nearest rivals and comfortably more than many complete bikes. This won't be an issue for some, and this is precisely who Campagnolo is targeting. But for the rest of us, it's a groupset of dreams, not reality. Yes, tradition can take you a long way in cycling. But is Super Record Wireless going too far? Time and the market will decide. BA

RRP: Super Record Wireless: $8,169.00; Super Record Wireless + Power Meter: $10,099.00; Super Record "S" Wireless: $6,799.00; Super Record "S" Wireless + Power Meter: $8,799.00

RIGHT: Shifting with Super Record Wireless is via twin paddles.

MAIN: Super Record Wireless is Campagnolo's flagship road groupset.

Super Record S

Towards the end of 2024, Campagnolo added a second-tier wireless option to its groupset stable. Somewhat confusingly known as 'Super Record S', it features a little more aluminium and a little less carbon than Super Record Wireless, together with a steel axle, solid crankset, standard bearings and matt black finishing. The complete groupset is 150 grams heavier, but also around $1,500 lighter on your hip pocket. Power meter and standard options are available.

Cycliq Fly12 Sport front light & camera

We tested the popular Cycliq front light & camera, that is more a safety device than just a light or camera.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

Cycliq is an Australian company that's been around since 2012. The current Fly12 front camera/light is the third generation, so it's a fairly slick piece of gear.

Cycliq describes it as a cycling safety system rather than a front light or an action camera. The camera's purpose is primarily to record incidents you might encounter, particularly on the roads, and it does that very well. Of course, it can also capture incredible moments like the one shown here, but it wasn't invented to compete with other action cameras.

While testing it, I was fortunate not to need any footage to prove what happened in an incident, but I have friends who have the same light and have used it to send video clips to authorities.

Straight out of the box, it's very easy to operate. When it's on, the camera is always recording, so there's no chance you'll forget to hit 'start' or 'stop'. You can adjust the light mode with different levels and flashing patterns. Most of my test rides were in light conditions, so I chose various flash modes and tested the full mode in darkness.

It is not as strong as my usual front light alone, but at 400 lumens, it is certainly adequate.

The video footage is recorded on the supplied 64GB micro SD card in MP4 format that comes with the unit, although you can use a card that holds up to 1TB. It is stored as an overwriting loop in three, five, or ten-minute segments. The footage can be viewed by plugging the device into a computer via a USB cable or removing the card and transferring the files with an adaptor.

Cycliq claims it can record up to seven hours of continuous video in camera-only mode, but I didn't go on a long enough ride to test this.

Where it comes into its own is recording incidents. If you fall, the Fly12 Sport will automatically trigger incident protection mode, locking the video and audio on either side of the incident. You can also press a button on the side of the light to lock a piece of footage while you're out and about.

Like most electronic gadgets, it has a companion phone app to adjust light and camera settings and check battery

The Cycliq duo mount for bike computer and Fly12.

life. I was disappointed I couldn't check the footage via the app, but Cycliq says its team is considering implementing this feature in the next-generation Fly12, with no release date yet.

The small screen at the rear shows the battery capacity and light mode, plus a bright red light to indicate recording, which I found helpful because you can see this easily while riding.

I also tested Cycliq's Duo Mount, a dual-purpose bike mount that attaches the Fly12 and bike computer to your handlebars, which was handy and neat. On another bike, I mounted the camera above the bars with the supplied mount, which also worked well. BA

The Cycliq Fly12 Sport retails for $449. More information cycliq.com

"WHERE IT COMES INTO ITS OWN IS RECORDING INCIDENTS. IF YOU FALL, IT WILL AUTOMATICALLY TRIGGER, LOCKING THE VIDEO AND AUDIO ON EITHER SIDE OF THE INCIDENT."

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Wahoo ELEMNT Ace

While this new Wahoo bike computer isn't one for the weight weenies, it's an impressive navigator and way to record all your ride stats.

WORDS: PETER MANIATY

The ELEMNT Ace is the new top dog of the Wahoo bike computer range. Significantly bigger and pricier than the ELEMNT Bolt and Roam models, it's loaded with features delivered via an impressive 97mm x 55mm touchscreen. That said, it isn't quite perfect. In fact when the ELEMNT Ace originally launched in late 2024, quite a bit of the promised functionality was still absent, suggesting Wahoo perhaps rushed to get it out in time for Christmas. Since then a series of firmware updates have addressed many of the initial issues and glitches, including several during the review period itself, and with Wahoo indicating more updates are in the pipeline it seems the ELEMNT Ace is only going to get better and better.

187
16²
MPH
Springs Rd
Springdale Rd
290 ft
Springdale Rd
Pause
Page

First impressions

With its generous size (126mm x 71mm x 24mm) and touchscreen, the ELEMNT Ace feels more like a small smartphone than mere bike computer. It's also a similar weight at around 208 grams. With a whopping 16 million colours and anti-glare screen, the display resolution is excellent – ideal for middle-aged eyes. Wahoo's existing Bolt and Roam mounts are too small on most bar systems, so the ELEMNT Ace instead ships with its own bespoke oversized alloy mount. Design wise, Wahoo's distinctive 'three button' interface remains, however, given the touchscreen allows you to shuttle through many of the functions with a swipe of a finger, the user experience is quite different.

> "ONE OF THE INTERESTING TECH INCLUSIONS IS A WIND SENSOR, DELIVERING WIND SPEED READINGS"

Noteworthy features

One of the more interesting tech inclusions is a wind sensor, delivering real-time wind speed readings via twin ports at the front of the unit. Whilst the theory sounds great, I found it only moderately useful in the real world given it's generally obvious when you're drafting on someone's wheel or ploughing through a block headwind. Word is, Wahoo is exploring additional functionality which may elevate its usefulness in the future. In addition to wind speed, other key ride data such as power, heart rate and gradients are colour-coded to provide 'at a glance' feedback when you're in different zones – green is good, red is bad, that kind of thing. Another handy feature is the digital bike bell; simply double-tap the bottom of the screen and 'ding! ding!' I was actually surprised how often I used it.

Getting started

With Wi-fi, Bluetooth 5.0 and ANT+ connectivity, setting up the ELEMNT Ace is a breeze, with most of the initial configuring done automatically through the main Wahoo app. Third party platforms such as Strava, Komoot and Training Peaks can be easily linked; same goes for external devices like your HRM, power meter and electronic shifters which sync directly with the head unit. Using the Wahoo app you can customise your ride data with up to 11 fields per display screen plus the ability to create new screens. You can also tailor different workout profiles for different types of riding. One thing I noticed is the unit is a little slow to start up, acquire satellites and sync to external sensors when you first turn it on. Another slight watch-out is using the touchscreen with long finger gloves. I found that a bit hit and miss.

KPH
217
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KM
39
RIDE
09:57
M ASCENT
14
CLOCK
7:17
Lap
Pause
Page

Garmin Edge 530 vs ELEMNT Ace.

Timer
00:46:32
Speed
0.0 km/h
Heart Rate
84 bpm
GARMIN
wahoo
KPH
00
BPM
84
WATTS
0
RIDE
46:58
KM
202
CLOCK
7:56
M ASCENT
66
Ride auto-paused
Stop
Resume
Page

Navigation

Powered by the same dual-band GPS technology used by the Roam V2, navigation is unquestionably one of the biggest strengths of the ELEMNT Ace. The large colour screen delivers excellent map visibility and coupled with your choice of distance countdowns, turn markers and audible prompts it's always clear where you should be going. Uploading routes is extremely straightforward; once you've synced your Wahoo and Strava accounts, for example, it happens automatically. You can create routes retrospectively from old GPX/FIT/TCX ride files, as well as toggle on/off a variety of map layers such as places of interest and street names. With 64GB of internal storage, the ELEMNT Ace comes pre-loaded with maps for pretty much the entire planet. Whilst it's certainly a novelty to have street navigation for Svalbard and the South Sandwich Islands, not sure I'll ever use it. Out of the box, the default settings deliver a cacophony of beeps to let you know when turns are approaching, but mercifully you can easily turn these off; same goes for voice navigation. Another useful feature is 'Back On Track' which provides automatic reroutes should you ever miss a turn or intentionally choose to stray a little. There's even the ability to generate new routes to hand-selected locations on the touchscreen map as you go. Live Strava Segments and Summit Segments are also available, the latter proving especially useful in helping to measure efforts on less familiar climbs.

Battery

Powered by a USB-C rechargeable Lithium-ion battery, Wahoo claims the ELEMNT Ace delivers 30 hours per charge. However, like others before me, I struggled to get even close to this. Admittedly the review was conducted in the middle of the Aussie summer and firmware updates may improve things, but the absolute best I could extract was ~22 hours between charges – and that was turning the backlight off completely, not overly practical. At normal battery burn, I averaged ~15 hours of runtime. Whilst personally, I have no issue charging my devices once a week or so, if the 30-hour claim is a big drawcard you may be a little disappointed. Recharging from 0% to 100% takes around three hours.

Summing up

Yes, the ELEMNT Ace is larger and more expensive than its Wahoo siblings, not to mention most of its rivals. Whilst there are probably more suitable head units for racing, when it comes to longer rides and touring, particularly where reliable GPS navigation is important, it's simply first class. The display, touchscreen and general functionality are already very good – and Wahoo's firmware updates are making it better all the time. BA

Specifications

Size: 125x70x20mm

Weight: 208g

Connectivity: Wi-fi, Bluetooth 5.0, ANT+

Charging: USB-C (cable included)

Waterproof Rating: IPX7

Mount: Alloy, 31.8mm (included)

Storage: 64GB

RRP: $999.95

HoverAir X1 Pro drone

Drones are a popular addition to any photographer's kit bag, but one that follows you on your bike is must have accessory for cyclists.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

THIS PAGE: The HoverAir X1 Pro is compact and lightweight.

OPPOSITE: In 'follow mode, ' the drone gives you a unique view and is a great way to record epic rides.

Despite being a 'writer-type', I also love technology. One of my early jobs was with Panasonic, and I thrived on learning about new gadgets. So when HoverAir asked me to test a new drone, I jumped at the chance.

Drones are not new, but ones that incorporate the ability to follow their subject without operating any controls are the latest must-have gadget for cyclists who like to record their rides from every angle.

I tested the new HoverAir X1 Pro, a 4K/60fps flying action camera that lived up to the hype. It does have a few shortcomings like it will only fly for 16 minutes at a time and will only follow you up to a maximum speed of 42 km/h, but it's still fun.

It is compact and folds neatly to carry in a cycling jersey pocket, albeit a largish pocket. Folded, it measures 149×105×34mm, similar to my iPhone's length, about 3cm wider, and about three times the thickness. So, you wouldn't put it in your pocket for every ride, but it can certainly fit in a generous-sized pocket for a special occasion.

It is also lightweight at only 192 grams with a battery fitted, 38 grams less than my iPhone!

Flight modes

Specifications are one thing; how it actually works is quite another. Being the tech lover I am, I tried out every mode but found the two that worked best for riding: 'follow mode' and 'dolly-track mode'. As the name suggests, 'follow mode' follows you from behind and can be set to follow from a close, mid or far distance, and travel at a high, flat or low altitude. The specifications say it can travel up to a height of 120 metres.

We adjusted the settings according to the terrain. For example, we set it high if there weren't many trees. If obstacles were present, it was better

at flat or low altitude. However, it is fitted with crash detection, so it should theoretically go around any obstacles.

The other mode is called 'dolly-track', which means it travels in front of you with the camera pointed towards the subject. This mode wasn't quite as smooth as follow mode in that it seemed to surge a bit, and I felt like I would catch up with it several times. I suspect that with practice, it will be smoother.

The other modes that work primarily when you are stationary are fun to capture vistas, like hover mode, which hovers in front; orbit mode, which circles around and zooms out; and bird's eye mode, which goes straight above.

Hover app

The controls are intuitive and best controlled with the Hover phone app, which has a range of 500m from the drone. To start a flight, you set it to the mode of your choice, place it on your palm with the camera facing the person you wish to track, and press the button. The camera locks onto the subject and then takes off.

It took a few practice runs to get this right, but I'm sure I would have it down pat with time. I even managed one crash landing, but it survived unscathed, partly because a flexible plastic frame fully protects the propellers.

On the app, you can preview it live, although I wouldn't recommend this while you're riding! You can also see a short preview after recording via the app or download the whole video to view on your phone. For most of my use, I downloaded the videos to my computer by connecting the drone to my laptop via a USB cable.

Resolution, storage and charging

The video resolution is 4K@60fps and 1080P@120fps in slow-motion mode, and it looks impressive on small and large screens. It has a 104-degree field of view.

I found the 32GB internal storage adequate for the videos I shot, but it also supports SD cards up to 1TB. The model I tested included two batteries, which is a great idea, considering each battery only gives 16 minutes of flying time. The batteries can be charged in the drone by plugging it directly into the power or in the supplied charger that holds two batteries. I also carried a power bank when I was out and about to give it a top-up. BA

The recommended retail is around $850. More information hoverair.com

BBB Chester full-frame sunglasses

These new BBB glasses have a hidden frame which makes them look good and function well too.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

Cycling glasses are a must-have accessory. They not only keep bugs out of your eyes, but they also shield you from the sun and wind, and of course, they look cool, too.

I'm a big fan of photochromatic cycling glasses because you can wear them when it's dark, and they'll adjust as the sun rises. So it was with some trepidation, I tested BBB's new Chester cycling shades.

But after just one outing, I realised my reluctance was unfounded. I tested them in various conditions, from early morning shady weather to bright sunshine, and they worked well every time.

I tested the new Chester narrow model designed to fit people like me with smaller heads, and they fit well. My partner tested the full-size model, and they fitted him nicely too.

BBB says that the Chester design combines the advantages of both full-frame and frameless glasses because it has a frameless appearance but conceals an internal frame. This design achieves the unobstructed view of frameless glasses while ensuring the durability and substantial feel of full-frame options, which I like.

I tested two pairs and preferred the look and function of the ones with the darker lenses. This is partly because of their appearance and partly for the sun protection factor.

The Chester Narrow, in matt white with a pink flash mirror lens, looks too pink to me (I'm not a fan of pink cycling gear) and feels too light for sunny skies. These have Category 2 lenses.

The Chester Narrow in matt black with smoke/rose MLC lenses (pictured here) looked better to me and functioned well in low light and bright sunshine with Category 3 lenses. I also liked the mirror effect of the lenses in the black pair, which probably contributed to their function, but for me, it was about how they looked.

My observations about the lenses are unsurprising, given that Category 2 lenses are designed to allow 18 to 43 per cent light transmission, making them suitable for clear days. Category 3 lenses allow eight to 18 per cent and are ideal for activities in bright sunshine.

My partner tested the Chester matt black with smoke blue MLC lenses and liked how they fit, how they looked, the larger size lenses, and how the arms locked in solidly. They also have Category 3 lenses.

We both found the rubber nosepiece and the rubber temple tips comfortable and adjustable to suit our requirements. I like that the frames are bio-based and made from castor beans, a more sustainable alternative that feels like regular plastic.

At just $89.99 for the Chester Narrow models and $99.99 for the (regular) Chester models, they are well-priced and cheaper than many competitors. BA

More info www.bbbcycling.com.au

Northwave Revolution with Italian panache

Our editor tested Northwave's new mid-range shoe and found them comfortable and functional, and definitely up to the task.

WORDS: NICOLA RUTZOU

Italian brand Northwave recently added the new Revolution mid-range shoe to its range, aiming for a 'pro' look in a comfortable shoe. They didn't disappoint.

The shoes I tested were the slightly funky light grey/sage colourway, but they are also available in three other options. I'd usually stick with the more conservative black or white for cycling shoes because they 'go with everything,' but I liked the distinctive look of these kicks.

As you would expect for a mid-range shoe, the soles are composite carbon rather than full carbon and have a stiffness index of 13 out of 15. For reference, my current road cycling shoes have full carbon soles, and these felt no less stiff to me. They were comfortable but supported my foot in the way that a stiff sole should.

Northwave says that the sole is designed to follow the anatomical shape of the foot arch to provide support and comfort, and they lived up to this claim. The Revolution shoes also include two air vents and laser holes to optimise airflow in and out, which meant my feet didn't overheat even when the temperature rose.

I ride with Shimano pedals and the cleats were easy to fit with a range of adjustments. The Revolutions are also Speedplay and Wahoo compatible with Northwave's optional adapter. They also have replaceable rubber heel pads that extend the shoes' lifespan.

The Revolution's closures are two dual-rotor dials in a funky lime green. They functioned well, although I constantly forgot which way to push or pull the buttons and dials to release them! Though I didn't test this out, they are designed to make micro-adjustments even while you're riding.

The uppers are made of PU synthetic leather, and although I managed to scuff the toes on every ride, they were easy to clean, so I suspect they'll still look good over time. The tongue with a sage green strip is made of mesh material, which adds to their breathability.

I must admit that the first time I wore them, they were a little uncomfortable because the top of the shoe pressed against the bottom of my ankle, but after a few wears, they have softened.

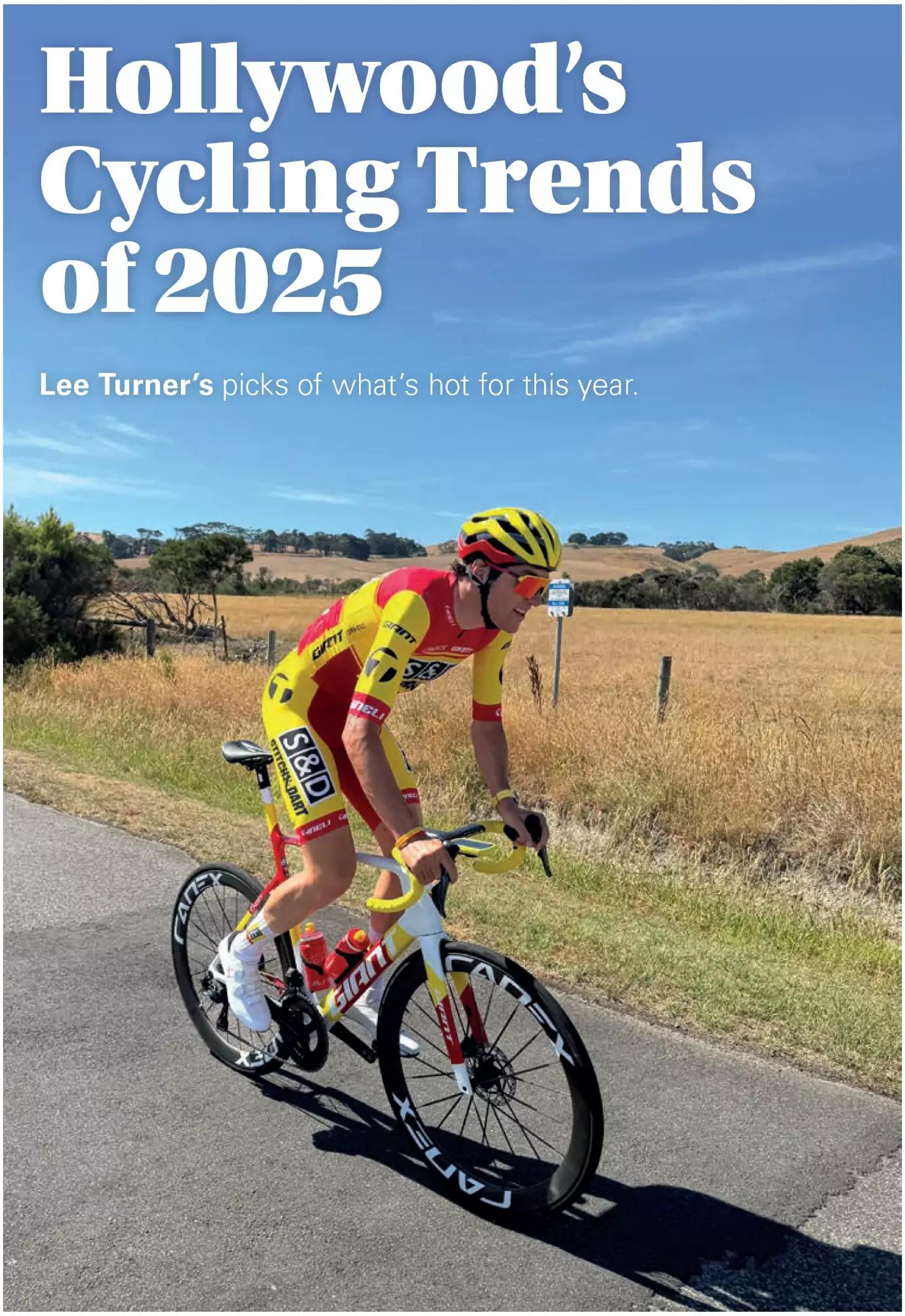
They also felt a little spacious around my toes, which, while not necessarily a bad thing (plenty of wriggle room), feels quite different from my other road cycling shoes. I suspect they would feel even better for people with wider feet, and incidentally, they come in a wide model, too.

Revolution is available in four colour versions: black, white, light grey/sage, and a bolder one with fluoro-red inserts. The new model is also available in a wide version.

More info www.northwave.com

Hollywood's Cycling Trends of 2025

Lee Turner's picks of what's hot for this year.



Rejoice! The year 2025 heralds a plethora of innovative trends and cutting-edge technologies that promise to revolutionise our riding. From state-of-the-art apparel to customised bike components, the latest developments in the cycling world are designed to enhance performance, comfort, and style. Here's a detailed look at the top cycling trends I believe will take centre stage this year.

The 2-in-1 suit

I have been riding 2-in-1 suits from Tineli for years, and I think they are great. Once only reserved for racing, we see more and more of these used in everyday riding. They are comfortable, easier to go to the toilet, and look PRO. I like that they are easier to hang on the line as well. The pros wear them because they are more aero, which we all want to be. I use them because they are comfortable and look and feel great on. They are sometimes cheaper than a bib and jersey, making them even more attractive.

Waxed chains

The cycling community is abuzz with the introduction of waxed chains, a game-changer in drivetrain maintenance. Unlike traditional lubricants, waxed chains offer superior performance by reducing friction, repelling dirt, and extending the life of your components. The application process involves treating the chain with a special wax formula that creates a durable, low-friction coating. This not only enhances shifting performance but also reduces the need for frequent cleaning and re-lubrication. A lot of bike shops now offer this great service. I like a waxed chain because it keeps it cleaner for longer. Once I get it waxed at my local bike shop, I use Squirt, a wax chain lube that works well and doesn't gather dirt. It is very easy to use as well. With advancements in waxing technology, it's now easier than ever to keep your drivetrain clean and efficient, making this trend a must-try for 2025.

Aero socks

Aero gains were reserved for bikes and helmets for years, but now socks are stealing the spotlight. Aero socks are engineered with textured fabrics and precise compression zones to reduce drag, offering measurable speed improvements.

Aero socks' snug fit and compression properties also enhance muscle support and blood circulation, contributing to overall performance and endurance. What I like best about aero socks is that you can set your sock height when you put them on, and then you don't have to touch them again; they just don't move. You can pull them right up high or opt for a more old-fashioned lower height, and they will stay put and not move.

Custom paint jobs

In 2025, personalisation is king, and custom paint jobs allow cyclists to express their unique style on the road. My last five bikes have been a custom paint design, and I love it. I designed my current bike from scratch after learning Adobe Illustrator. From intricate designs to bold colour schemes, the possibilities are endless. This trend is not only about aesthetics but also about celebrating individuality and making a statement. There are quite a few custom painters out there. I personally always use Sun Graphics in Melbourne as its work is flawless. I just think you are riding your bike nearly every day. Why not have a design that means something to you and something you absolutely love? A lot of bike manufacturers' paint schemes are conservative, so why not stand out from the crowd? Some bike manufacturers like Pinarello and Trek offer their own in-house customisation, but this also has some limitations to colour combinations.

"AERO GAINS WERE RESERVED FOR BIKES AND HELMETS, NOW SOCKS ARE IN THE SPOTLIGHT."

Custom kits

Matching your bike isn't enough anymore; your kit needs to make a statement, too. Custom cycling kits are taking off, with teams and solo riders alike designing apparel that reflects their personality, brand, or team spirit. With endless possibilities for colours, patterns, and logos, custom kits are a way to ride in style while standing out from the peloton.

The trend towards customisation extends to every aspect of the kit, from jersey and bib shorts to gloves and accessories. With custom kits, cyclists can enjoy a personalised fit that enhances aerodynamics and comfort, making every ride a pleasure.

I have been using Tineli for years, and when it comes to custom, I personally think they are the best. There are so many other great cycling apparel brands offering custom kits, including Champ Systems, Cuore, Babici, Santini, and Ventou.

One-piece bars

The rise of one-piece bars marks a significant shift in handlebar design. While far from new, I noticed how many riders were using them in last year's Tour de France. When I got my new bike late last year, I got some Cadex one-piece bars, and I must say I love them. They are so clean, and the stiffness is incredible. These integrated handlebars combine the stem and bar into a single, seamless unit, offering improved stiffness, weight savings, and aerodynamics. The clean, minimalist design enhances the bike's aesthetic appeal and provides a more direct and responsive handling experience. I'm sold!

Embracing the future of cycling

As we move through 2025, it's clear that the cycling world is poised for exciting advancements. From versatile apparel to innovative components, the latest trends are designed to enhance every aspect of our riding experience. Whether you're a competitive racer, a dedicated commuter, a try-hard like me, or a weekend warrior, these emerging trends offer something for everyone. Embrace the future of cycling and gear up for a big year of kilometres. Everyone loves new stuff so get on board. BA

ABOVE: Hollywood embraces custom paint jobs, one-piece bars, custom kit, waxed chains and aero socks.

Jayco
Adelaide
Jayco

I like it Gerry and Whitey's way

In terms of bang for your buck, they're one of the best performers on the WorldTour – and as long as two people remain involved things won't change, writes **Anthony Tan**.

Unlike the world's top two superteams, UAE Team Emirates–XRG and Team Visma–Lease a Bike, where, between them, 15 riders have contracts extending to 2027 or beyond, out of Team Jayco AlUla's men's roster for 2025, just one has a contract till 2027 – and it's not Ben O'Connor.

West Australian O'Connor, who transferred from Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale Team after four seasons and a breakthrough 2024 that saw him finish fourth overall at the Giro d'Italia and second at the Vuelta a España, has been given two years to walk the talk.

Is it a question of budget that they didn't give him a contract till 2028 as Visma-Lease a Bike has done for Jonas Vingegaard or, in the case of UAE Team Emirates and Tadej Pogačar, all the way to 2030 – or not throwing all their eggs in one basket?

I think it's a bit of both.

When it comes to overall team budgets, UAE Team Emirates and Visma-Lease a Bike are comfortably in the top five WorldTour teams, if not the top three, and Pogačar's recently renewed annual €8 million (AUD$13M) salary alone would easily be more than what the entire Jayco AlUla roster get paid.

Not camping but not glamping

Don't get me wrong, Jayco AlUla is not camping while others are staying at the Ritz, because if Lance Armstrong's old sport director Johan Bruyneel is right (and he usually is about these sorts of things) then O'Connor is getting around €3 million (AUD$5M) this year and next.

For an outfit mostly bankrolled by one man, that of course being Melbourne businessman Gerry Ryan, that's enough risk in itself, wouldn't you say?

Let's not forget that to date, out of Big Ben's best three Grand Tour outings, two (2021 Tour de France, 2024 Vuelta) came about because he snuck himself in a breakaway in the first half of the race and gained more than five minutes' advantage on the main contenders. Last year's Giro was a more traditional approach to a potential podium, but his eventual fourth place equated to being 12'07 behind eventual winner Pogačar.

This is not to say O'Connor's performances have not been legit; more that if he's gunning for the podium, he's less likely to find himself in a break without being more heavily marked and chased down. Though, as he's shown in stage races and one-dayers, the toothy West Australian does have a knack of making the right moves, as demonstrated at last year's road world championships in Zürich, Switzerland, where he finished second to The Pog.

Journey important as the destination

As a business person, Ryan has demonstrated success in building his Jayco caravan empire to what it is today the most successful caravan company in Australia and New Zealand.

Australia is incredibly fortunate the septuagenarian also happens to love cycling, and, to a large extent, has underwritten its development for close to three decades. However, for Ryan it was never about 'throwing in a bunch of cash and let's see what happens'.

From the team's debut as GreenEDGE in 2012, his approach has been markedly different from INEOS Grenadiers owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe, who took over the title sponsorship from Team Sky in May 2019.

What was the world's most dominant team from 2012-19 now looks like a sinking ship.

After team principal Sir Dave Brailsford took a less active role in December 2021 when he was appointed Director of Sport at Ineos, overseeing a range of teams sponsored by the group including French football club Nice and Manchester United, they appear to have lost their way – including key riders Tao Geoghegan Hart (Lidl–Trek), Pavel Sivakov (UAE Team Emirates), Richard Carapaz (EF Education–EasyPost), Adam Yates (UAE Team Emirates) and their highest-profile departure of 2024, Tom Pidcock (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team).

If you read my last column, you'll know INEOS was the team that offered Egan Bernal a five-year deal in 2018, then in 2022 another four year extension weeks before the Colombian almost killed himself in a training accident, so long contracts work both ways.

As brutal as it sounds, professional road cycling is too dangerous to offer contracts any more than three years; the risk-reward ratio is off the charts. When Vingegaard crashed at last year's Itzulia Basque Country, the Dane's life and career could easily have gone the way of Bernal – or worse, like Gino Mäder who lost his life in a crash at the 2023 Tour de Suisse.

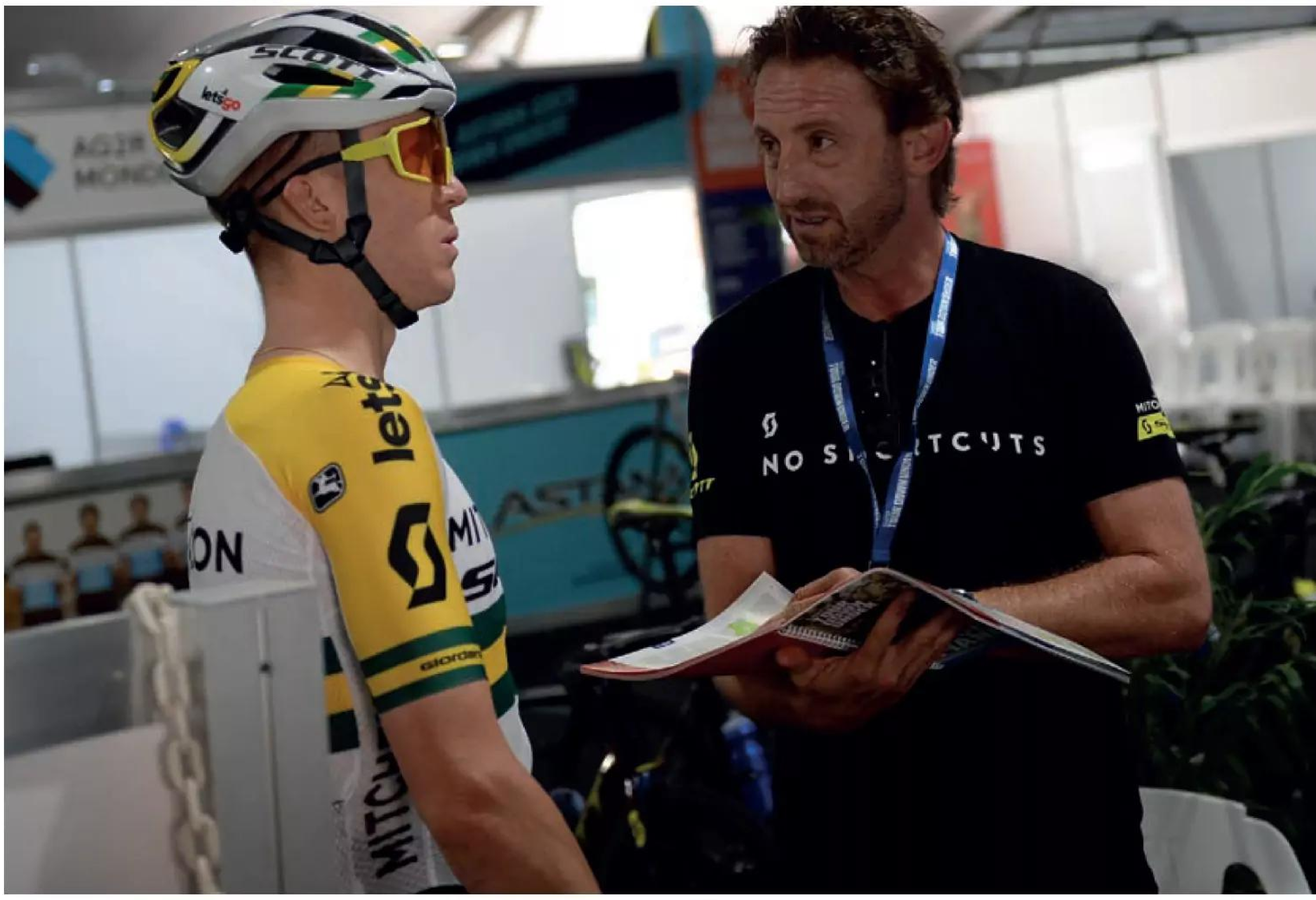
Will not, and never be, a one-man band

Ryan and head sports director Matthew White – who's also been there from the start – have been around long enough to see that. So, as much as they're hoping O'Connor can deliver at the Tour, and as much as he's been paid, it's not all about him. The two-year contracts most of the riders are on is somewhat of a 'treat 'em mean, keep 'em keen' mentality.

OPPOSITE: Gerry Ryan with the team staff and riders from the Jayco junior development teams.

BELOW: Luke Plapp at this year's Tour Down Under.

BOTTOM: Jayco-AlUla's Matt White with rider Cameron Meyer at the 2020 Tour Down Under.



Caleb Ewan at the 2024 Vuelta Burgos.

It's worked all the way until now, so why change it?

Not locking in big-name riders on three-year plus, multimillion dollar contracts also frees up funds to acquire riders who may better fit the Jayco AlUla mould than their incumbent as well as jettison consistent under performers.

With respect to the former two that come to mind happen to be INEOS Grenadiers alumni: Irishman Eddie Dunbar, who joined in 2023, and our current national TT champ Luke Plapp, who began his Jayco AlUla journey at the start of last year.

> “PLAPP HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE AUSTRALIA'S NEXT BIG THING IN GRAND TOURS”

It was only after joining the team and five seasons on the WorldTour that Dunbar received an opportunity to race as a protected rider in a three-week race. He didn't disappoint: at the 2023 Giro he finished seventh overall, only his second Grand Tour. His door-busting breakthroughs, however, came at last year's Vuelta where he took a pair of mountaintop stage victories. One can sense the 28-year-old is just getting his two-wheeled party started.

Then there's triple national TT and road race champ Plapp, who has the potential to be Australia's next big thing in Grand Tours – if he wants it. INEOS Grenadiers was never a good fit for the Melburnian, but at 24 years young time is on his side – and as the only Jayco AlUla rider with a deal till 2027 his team are giving him the space to grow and time to discover what he wants and what he can do.

Out of the 18 WorldTour teams in 2025, Jayco AlUla is one of seven fielding the maximum complement of 30 riders*. That depth; their belief in not tying down riders to contracts longer than three years and giving everyone a fair go should they earn it; notwithstanding their proven ability to nurture talent of all ages, has made them one of the most agile outfits since their inception thirteen years ago.

And, very importantly, they seem to do it while having fun. Life is too short and professional cycling is too hard not to enjoy yourselves.

They don't get everything right, but they learn, they adapt, and they grow. And they may just produce our next Grand Tour winner. BA

Caleb's next chapter

Between Team Jayco AlUla announcing their 30th and final spot on November 7 last year and a December 29 press release, something strange happened behind the scenes.

Even though Ewan was contracted to ride for 2025 rumours were swirling that he was looking elsewhere, because as far as the TdF was concerned there was room for only one sprinter: Dylan Groenewegen.

When Mark Cavendish said his last race would be the Singapore Crit in November, Ewan's next home looked to be XDS Astana.

Yet, despite 14 outgoings from season 2024 and as many incomings for 2025, his name did not fall into the latter group.

When a deal with XDS Astana could not be brokered it clearly ruffled a few feathers back at Jayco AlUla. His name was absent from their line-up for the 2025 Tour Down Under – where Ewan is a nine-time stage winner – nor did he attend the December training camp.

While Jayco AlUla offered no comment during this time, their website was a reliable indicator: his name had been removed from their riders' line-up.

On January 23, it was revealed Ewan had signed for INEOS Grenadiers. “In 2025, my goal is to return to winning big races. I firmly believe I (still) have it in me,” he said.

Neither can we. Watch this space.

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